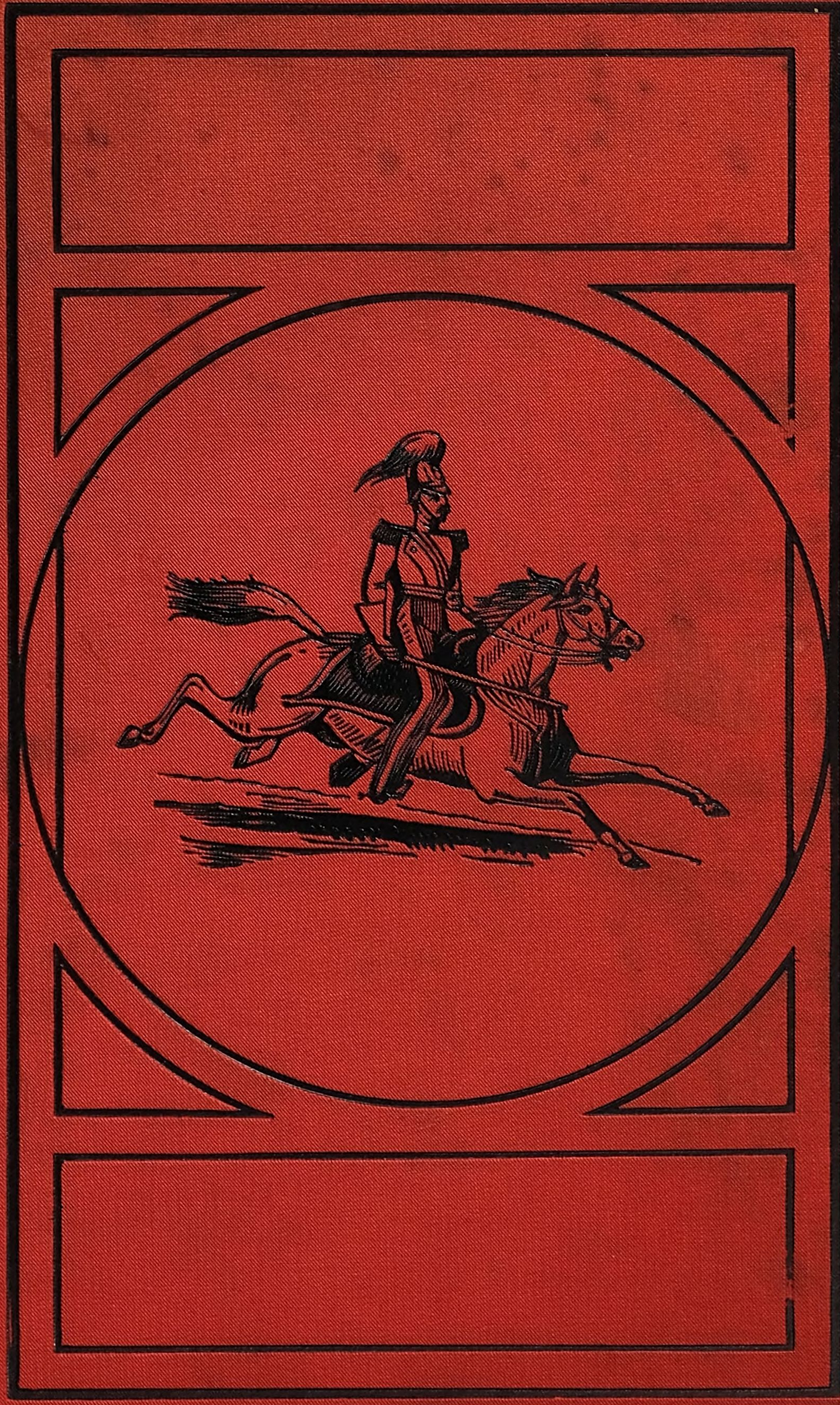


RY

E

TER

NDUS



Aus der
Büchersammlung des Capitäns
Th. Dempster Gordon.
Geschenk des k. Forstrathes G. Dürig
an die k. Bibliothek.

L. angl.
188⁰
2

CAVALRY LIFE
OR
SKETCHES AND STORIES
IN BARRACKS AND OUT

By J. S. WINTER



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1881.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

LONDON
KELLY & CO., PRINTERS,
28, LITTLE QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, LONDON, W.C.,
AND MIDDLE MILL, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.



CONTENTS OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

	PAGE
I.—HIS PRINCESS	1
II.—BY-AND-BYE	37
III.—SUPERSEDED	62
IV.—THE LADY-KILLER-IN-CHIEF	101
V.—THE SAD HISTORY OF BOB SABRETASCHE	135
VI.—A SATANIC A.D.C.	174
VII.—SERGEANT THE HONOURABLE HUGH BRABAZON	187
VIII.—N.—; OR, AS WE GO ON	212
IX.—A REGIMENTAL LODGE.	231
X.—CONSCIENCE	254

CAVALRY LIFE.



HIS PRINCESS.

DICK CARTER stood in front of the ante-room fire, with his hands behind his back. It was Christmas-eve, and on the last day of the year the regiment was to sail for India's coral strand. For his part, Dick wished India's coral strand was at the deuce; but then, since neither his nor any other Cuirassier's wishes could alter either the position of India's coral strand or the sending thither of the regiment, Dick had no alternative but to accept the situation, which he did with much swearing—what his Princess called “choice Italian.”

“Who is to have the depot?” some one asked presently; “are you, Carter?”

“Can't afford it; I've too many of those beastly bills. Why don't you take it?”

“If I can get safe on board, I shall be in luck,” he laughed.

“I can't say I altogether look forward to being on

board," put in Dickson, in accents of great disgust ; "for I overheard Mrs. Newcombe telling Mrs. Hey, in Jones's shop yesterday, that the voyage will be great fun, for they will dine with the officers every day."

"By Jove!" murmured three or four voices, half in surprise, half in indignation ; for Mrs. Newcombe was the adjutant's wife, Mrs. Hey that of the quartermaster.

"Mrs. Newcombe having been out before knew all about it, and was initiating Mrs. Hey into the mysteries and delights of ship life. Mrs. Hey was, I fancy, rather taken aback by the prospect of the daily dinner, and gasped out 'Oh! lor.'"

A perfect roar of laughter greeted the words, and he continued. "They neither of them saw me for ever so long, and then Mrs. Hey made a clean bolt of it. I wasn't sorry, for I'd been wanting to laugh for some time."

The only one who did not join in the laughter was Dick Carter, who, still before the fire, was gazing abstractedly out of the window, past the rows of ugly barrack-buildings, to the murky sky beyond. Almost unconsciously his lips screwed themselves up and he whistled softly the notes of a song, which he had heard the night before—

Will you think of me and love me, as you did once long ago?

“Curse it,” said Dick, savagely.

“What?” Scott asked, innocently, never thinking of the words of the song, indeed it was doubtful if he knew them.

“Oh ! everything,” Dick returned, volubly ; “India—bills—everything.” But, all the same, it was neither India nor the bills which made that vigorous anathema slip off his tongue just then.

He snatched up the poker and stirred the fire energetically—to speak with entire correctness, he did not stir the fire at all but smashed it, as if it was the coral strand of India, and he had a special mission to send it to the deuce.

Then, seeing that the chatter of voices had gone on again, he straightened himself up once more and went back to his occupation of watching the sky, thinking the while. He had one or two very unpalatable things to think about just then : first of all, there were his bills—not that he objected to a few bills, he had had them, bless you, ever since the days when he had emerged from frocks and tunics into knickerbockers—he would have bills, as he very well knew, to the end of the chapter ; he rather liked them, there was something so uncomfortable in paying ready-money, counting out the coins, haggling over the change, and getting discount. Dick felt rather ashamed of that discount ;

but then, to be sure, the times when he had received it were few and far between—like angels' visits. No! he hadn't the least objection in the world to a few bills; he had never been what he called "a ready-money devil;" but, unfortunately, there were other people concerned who were not so easy-going as Dick was—those were the creditors. He had been forced to put his pride in his pocket a good many times of late, and, like several others of the Cuirassiers, he knew that if he could manage to get on board the *Jumna* without being arrested, he should consider himself very lucky. Then, besides the bills, he would have on the morrow to be present at the men's dinner—just to say a word to them; and on the following day he would have to make a regular speech, for he was to give a dinner to his troop, which would cost a lot of money—not that he grudged a few pounds; but he was so awfully hard-up just then, there was no doubt about it. Well! he supposed he should get over the bills and the confounded speech in time; but there was another matter at which Dick could not look so philosophically. Unconsciously his whistling broke out again—

"*Che faro senza Euridice*——" but there he stopped with a suddenness which was a shriek of pain in miniature, and stood looking blindly at

nothing, with such pain in his blue eyes, that it would have made your heart ache to see it! Not that his brother officers noticed anything, more than that "Carter was down in the mouth to-day, poor chap;" they were busy, one in retailing, the others in listening to the story of a quarrel which Captain Long had had with his wife that morning, and which Mr. Scott had overheard from his room, which stood at right angles to the Long's dining-room. What do you say? you don't believe cavalry officers descend to such little mean tittle-tattling as to discuss matrimonial squabbles? Then that only shows all you know about cavalry officers!

Ordinarily, Dick Carter was as good a hand at talking scandal as any officer in the regiment; but on that occasion his mind was otherwise engaged. He was wondering how he was to get over the parting with his Princess. A fine fellow he was, this same Dick, lithe of limb, tall of stature—for he was but slightly under six feet, square in the chest, strong, graceful, careless—a very *beau idéal* of a cavalry officer—with a sensible face, clean shaven, save for a heavy moustache of reddish-brown, a face which would have been handsome had it not been for a certain squareness in the jaw, but which could not be thought ugly, for the beauty of the keen blue eyes and the brightness of

the fair hair above it. Looking at him for the first time across a room or a street your first impulse would probably lead you to remark, "What an ill-tempered, haughty face;" but if you were brought close to him, and he wished to be civil—that just made all the difference in Dick—in two minutes you would be entirely won by his fascinating smile; but then, perhaps, his persuasive voice and manner might have had a good deal to do with the change.

And whilst Dick was thinking rather dismally of the immediate future, the orderly officer for the day entered hastily.

"Oh, you're here, Carter!" he exclaimed; "there's an uncommonly suspicious-looking chap asking for you!"

"Where? Who?"

Dick was on the alert in an instant; for a moment his Princess was forgotten.

"A writ, I should say," Havers laughed; "and the bearer of it has just been bundled ignominiously out of your room by your man, who informed him you had gone to Paris, and were not coming back to England at all; but would join the regiment at Malta."

"Clever chap," Dick murmured, as he put on his hat and caught up his gloves and stick, departing hastily.

It was but a step from the back door of the mess-rooms to the house in which he was quartered. Dick's long legs took him up the stairs four at a time, and with such haste, that he almost annihilated Craddock, who was occupied in washing the flagged landing between his master's rooms and those of Mr. Scott. He paused in his task, and sat back upon his heels with the flannel floor-cloth in his hands.

"Just had a bum-bailiff here, sir," he said, coolly.

"Yes, hang it! I know," returned Dick, savagely. "Can you keep him out if he comes back here, do you think?"

"I'll punch his 'ed if he comes up my steps," Craddock replied, in a matter-of-fact tone, though a slow smile of delight overspread his fresh, good-looking countenance.

Dick laughed outright. "All right, then, I'll trust to you."

"Very well, sir," and Craddock went on deliberately washing the landing and then the stairs.

In order that he might hear anything which transpired, Dick left his door open, and presently he heard an oily voice asking if Lieutenant Carter had come *yet*?

"*No*; Leefetenant Carter hain't come *yet*," replied Craddock, calmly.

“I’ve heerd as ’ow he’s in this ’ouse,” remonstrated the visitor.

“Oh! you’re like for to know best,” was the sarcastic reply.

“I must come up and see for myself,” he went on, emboldened by Craddock’s unlooked-for mildness.

“Oh! yer must, must yer? Then let me tell yer, me fine gentleman, that I’m a ’onest dragoon what serves her Majesty the Queen, and I don’t take Government pay for washing steps for the likes of you to walk up and down.”

“Oh! I won’t make no dirt,” the bum promised, eagerly.

“I don’t expect yer will,” returned Craddock, affably.

Now the emissary of the law—I suppose a bum-bailiff *is* an emissary of the law—being a small spare man of ten stone or so, felt that a personal contest with a dragoon standing over six feet in his socks, and riding about thirteen stone-ten, would hardly suit his purpose; therefore, taking up his position against the jamb of the outer door, he proceeded to try and discover whether Craddock was of the class which, like the deaf adder, refuseth to hear the voice of the charmer, or whether he was open to blarney? Now, upon certain occasions,

Craddock was open to blarney, but then that was when the donor of it was of the softer sex; to a bum-bailiff Craddock was as hard as iron.

“It’s only bad sort of weather,” remarked the emissary, pleasantly.

Excepting for a suppressed growl, Craddock did not condescend to return any reply.

“Sort of weather when one wants something warm inside, eh?”

“You’ll get something warm *outside* if you hain’t orf soon,” returned Craddock.

“Did you feel dry at all?” said the emissary, presently, ignoring his opponent’s last remark. “I must admit I feels dry myself.”

“Ah! there’s a pump over yonder, at the stables,” answered Craddock, significantly, “and there’s some water in this ’ere bucket, though, to be sure, it hain’t over clean.”

Having finished off the first half of the stairs, he rose from his knees, stretched himself, and coolly planted his back against the wall. Seeing that, the emissary returned to the charge again, this time with a ludicrous assumption of authority, which made Dick and his man both laugh out aloud.

“Come, come, young man, you must let me come up them stairs.”

“You’d better try, that’s ali,” said Craddock.

“I know Lieutenant Carter’s up there.”

“Leefetenant Carter *hain’t* up there, I tell yer,” thundered Craddock, with utter disregard of the punishment in store for fabricators.

“Now look ’ere”—speaking confidently—“I’ll give you ’arf-a-crown for yourself if you’ll let me come up them stairs.”

“Chuck us yer ’arf-crown,” answered the dragoon, suspiciously.

With much fumbling the emissary produced a shilling, which he held poised on his finger.

“Arf-a-crown,” said Craddock, stolidily.

“Say a florin.”

“Arf-a-crown,” was the dogged reply—“not a ha’penny less.”

After a good deal of circumlocution, the half-crown was thrown from the emissary to the servant. Dick, leaning against the door of his room, wondered what was coming next.

“Now, I’ve paid up fair, so let me see into them rooms,” said the emissary, eagerly.

Craddock cast a glance of most thorough contempt at him, and dipped his floor-cloth once more into the bucket. “I’ll see you d—d first,” he returned, deliberately, as he wrung it out, and went on washing the landing, at which Dick burst into a wild fit of uncontrollable laughter.

Craddock glanced up carelessly. "It's all very fine for you to laugh, Jinks," he said, in his stolid imperturbable way; "it hain't your turn to wash the steps down, or may be it wouldn't be so funny. Is Mr. Scott's mastiff in his room?"

"Yes," grunted Dick, disguising his voice.

"Then just let 'im out, there's a good chap; he'll make pretty short work of this cove down here." Then, as Dick opened Scott's door, "'Ere Lion, come along—set 'em orf"—but the emissary had departed, a good deal faster than his wont.

Seeing the result of his *ruse*, Craddock sat down on the stairs and just roared with laughter, till he could roar no longer, and Mr. Scott going in found the laughter of master and man so irresistible that he could not ask what was the joke for the merriment which absolutely choked him.

"Craddock, go and see which way the brute's gone," said Dick, presently.

"Just going out of the gates, sir."

"Then come along," cried Scott, hastily; "there's a cab just driven up to the mess, and I told him to wait, thinking you might want it."

"Thanks, old man," said Dick, gratefully.

For the present the danger was over. As they drove towards the gates Dick uttered a sigh of relief—a sigh which quickly, however, turned to

one of impatience, as a few bars of "Auld Lang Syne" floated out from one of the buildings they passed.

"Practising that thing already," Dick said, with what was almost a groan. "Goodness knows it's bad enough when it comes to the last, without hearing it every day for three weeks previously."

"Auld Lang Syne" was the farewell air when the Cuirassiers departed from old quarters for fresh ones. Like many another, Dick hated it as though it were poison, but he had never before detested it so cordially as he did then. I know one regiment which always used to play "When other lips and other hearts"—I daresay they play it still, only they have been frizzling in India for ten years, so I have not had an opportunity of judging; I knew another which kept to the hackneyed "Girl I leave behind me;" and another which of late has played "Sweethearts" for the march out. Of them all, I consider "The girl I leave behind me" is the best. There is a certain jollity about it—it is almost impossible to feel affected by it. Once, though, when a gay and gallant regiment, of famous Peninsular and Crimean memory, was leaving a town prior to embarking for India, there was an unusual amount of weeping and wailing over the departing heroes;

bitter were the tears shed to the strains, which somehow always make me laugh :

My love, I will come back again
To the girl I leave behind me.

Oh ! the tender partings—the fond women folk who clung to the stirrups and tramped some miles of the way for a last hour together. Oh ! the passionate injunctions, “ You’ll not forget me, Jack ? ” I doubt not that under their gay trappings many a poor fellow’s heart throbbed painfully, many an eye was dim beneath the shelter of the busby, with an emotion none guessed aught of save themselves. “ A change came o’er the spirit of my dream, and it was eventime.” Past the gate came two girls, who in the morning had been especially and particularly demonstrative in their leave-taking, and with them—if you please—two men of the relieving regiment.

“ Sarah,” said one to the other, as they passed, “ now isn’t these chaps a deal better than the ’Leventh ? ”

“ ’Leventh !—bah ! ” returned Sarah, scornfully.

Oh, Sarah ! Sarah !—I minded me of the sore heart and the moist eyes I had noticed in the morning, and I was sorry, till I remembered that Jack and Bill were probably playing the same old drama at the first halting-place.

“Where are you going, Dick?” Scott asked, as they neared the town.

“‘The Swan.’”

“Ah!”

Scott asked no further questions.

Dick's Princess, who with her brother had come to see the last of him, was staying at “The Swan.”

And what was she like, this Princess? Not handsome, certainly, as Dick once said to her himself: “You are perhaps not exactly handsome”—he had hitherto stoutly maintained that she was—“but then, don't you see, you are the sort of girl that every second man would turn round to look after.”

“That's the prettiest compliment any one ever paid me in my life,” laughed the girl, gaily.

She was standing by the window as Dick entered the room, a tall girl, in a closely clinging gown of black; a girl with good dark eyes and a perfect form. She would, perhaps, have been better-looking had the eyes been more often filled with laughter, had there been a less haughty expression of the mouth, less resolution in the whole face, voice and gestures. She never looked haughty to Dick, though, to him, voice and gestures were always tender: when her eyes rested upon him, they always

shone with that tender love-light which comes to the eyes of all of us at some period of our lives or other.

“Are you going to take me for a walk, Dick?” she asked; “it is late, but still, you may as well.”

Dick explained the circumstances which had prevented him from going earlier, and added, moreover, that it would be as well, perhaps, not to venture out that day more than was absolutely necessary.

“After to-morrow it won’t matter,” he ended; “a writ must give eight days in which to pay up, and by that time we shall have sailed.”

“Oh, Dick!” said the girl with a suppressed sob. Alas! the love-light had been dimmed by tears very often of late, and there was a suspicious brightness in the dark eyes upturned to him then.

Dick bent down and kissed her very tenderly.

“What has my Princess done with all her pluck?” he asked, then hurried on with an earnestness which showed how little trust he had in himself. “When it comes to the last, my darling, you won’t give way, you’ll be strong and brave, that I may be able to keep up too? You’ll just say ‘good-bye,’ quietly, without any fuss.”

“I don’t know—but I’ll try,” she answered.

“You know, Princess, you are strong and brave; not like some women, who have no pluck! Gather up all your resolution and let me remember you smiling to the last.”

“I only have one weakness,” she said, with a wistful tenderness, which showed how firm a hold upon her that weakness had.

“And that is——”

“Yourself,” she replied, simply.

“And you call me a weakness?”

“My love for you is a weakness, because—oh! Dick, you won’t go away and forget me?”

“Of course not. My love, it will soon be over: just two years, till I get my debts paid, and then I shall come home, and we will laugh together at our fears at parting. It will only be two years, Princess—three, at most—before I come home to you.”

“You never will,” she said, calmly. “Dick, dear, sometimes you wonder that I am low-spirited, what you men call ‘down in the mouth,’” with a gleam of laughter struggling through the sadness in her eyes; “but you are careless, and I am not. You, if you have what you wish in the present, are content—you don’t look into the future. I do, and I count the hours, almost the moments, that are left to me, because I *know* that they are the end.”

47

“They are not the end!” he cried, passionately; “when I come back, we will go to Italy together, and then I will make you cry *peccavi* for your foolish fancies now.”

“Yes, we will go to Italy together,” repeated the girl, dreamily. “What a pity it is that we cannot go to Italy now, whilst we are young, whilst we love each other. Oh! what a nuisance money is—how vexed I am that I am poor.”

“I don’t care,” he said, defiantly.

“Don’t you?” she asked, wistfully; “but then, don’t you see, you have not any money either.”

“No, by Jove! I havn’t; I only wish I had,” he exclaimed, ruefully.

“What a pity one cannot sell one’s pedigree,” she said, musingly.

“Is it long? What do you value it at?” he laughed.

“Why, where do you think those came from?” she asked, holding a row of filbert nails just in front of his nose.

“Came from? I should think you grewed ’em,” he replied, making an effort to kiss the fingers.

“Growed ’em, of course; but they don’t grow by chance.”

“No, perhaps not; the Greeks did not admire

filbert nails," he said, coolly; "too near an approach to the claws of a beast, you know."

"I should have given the Greeks credit for more sense," remarked the Princess, superbly; "but, since I live in the nineteenth century, I am very glad to possess my filberts, without worrying about the ancient Greeks."

Just then a knock was heard at the door, to which Dick called out, "Come in."

"There's a gentleman wants to see you, sir," said the waiter.

"A gentleman. What sort of a gentleman?" Dick asked, suspiciously.

"Well, sir," returned the man, looking round cautiously, "it's Mr. Goodenough's clerk."

"And who the dickens is Mr. Goodenough?" demanded Dick, rising.

"Oh, he's a lawyer, sir."

"Oh! a lawyer, is he? Well, don't let Mr. Goodenough's clerk come up here, that's all. By-the-bye, how did he know I was here?"

"Saw you come in, I think, sir."

"Ah! where is he?"

"In the bar."

"Then let him stop, if he likes. I suppose all customers are good for the house—eh?" with a laugh.

“Well yes, sir, of course,” the waiter replied. “I believe he means to wait until you come out.”

At this intelligence Dick and the Princess laughed aloud.

“He’ll have to wait a good while, then,” Dick laughed. “I suppose you’ve some spare rooms?”

“Oh! yes, sir.”

“Then I’ll sleep here to-night. I didn’t intend to turn my rooms upside down until Monday, but a few days won’t make much difference. Don’t let that brute up here, waiter, that’s all.”

“Well, sir, I’ll try, of course; but if he insists on coming up?”

“These are *my* rooms,” put in the Princess, with sudden dignity; “you had better tell him that these are Mr. Villiers’s rooms, and that he cannot enter them. I wish,” she continued to Dick, “that Jack would come in, I don’t know where he has gone.”

“Oh! it’s all right,” he laughed.

“I should have thought, now,” she went on, plaintively, “that you were quite capable of breaking a clerk’s head for him; when I first knew you, you used to talk very largely about twisting any one’s neck, who presumed to look twice at me, but it seems to have been all idle swagger.”

“Oh! I would break his head or twist his neck

with the greatest pleasure, only, don't you see, if he sees me, he will be able to serve the writ on me."

"Oh ! I didn't know," she said, rather blankly.

Presently the waiter came back, and closing the door behind him, set his back against it.

"If you please, sir," he began, solemnly, "he says he won't go away, not if he sits in the bar till morning ; and I don't believe he will, he's a determined sort of fellow is Johnson."

"He's very welcome to sit in the bar till he turns to a mummy," Dick replied, politely ; "you can tell him so, with my compliments, if you like."

"Well, sir, but if he steals up here ?—I can't be watching the staircase all the day."

"Look here, waiter, just keep Mr. Johnson out of my way and I'll give you a sovereign. Here it is."

"Well, I'll do my best, sir"—the sovereign had made all the difference to Joseph—"but, if you'll take my advice, you'll keep this door locked, and go in and out through Mr. Villiers's bedroom." The brother of the Princess occupied an apartment opening out of the sitting-room and having a second door on to a landing, connected with the principal corridor and staircase. "If he stays, as I think he will, I'll bring dinner up by the billiard-room and the back stairs."

"What fun," cried the Princess, clapping her

hands, as Dick turned the key behind the retreating servitor; "I feel as if we had gone back a few hundred years and were being besieged—this was the sort of thing my crusading ancestors went in for. It is like the siege of Jerusalem in miniature, only we are on the wrong side of the barricades."

"Did your ancestors go to the Crusades?" Dick asked.

"Of course! We came over with the Conqueror and did all the Crusade business, and finally settled down in Ireland, intending to become respectable gentry; unfortunately, we got mixed up with royalty, and learned from experience that 'he who increaseth riches increaseth care.' The elder branches of the family—the semi-royal family took good care of themselves—couldn't keep to their quiet, respectable country life, but must needs get attainted for high treason, so, of course, forfeited their estates. Perhaps they had got a few drops of the wild Irish blood mingled with the cool determined Norman stock—any way, instead of being a belted earl now, Jack is only a poor sailor, with nothing a-year but his pay. Our men never could keep their money; they could make it, or—in the elegant fashion of former times—take it, but they could not keep it. My own grandfather, after serving through the Peninsular, after being with Abercrombie in Egypt, and with Picton at

Waterloo, after being in twenty-four engagements, besides skirmishes, hadn't sense to stick to what he had got, but went and put—'invested' he called it—all his money in some manufacturing concern, as a sleeping partner. He woke up one fine morning to find the others gone and himself saddled with all the liabilities—a fine end that was for Abercrombie's *aide* to come to."

"So your grandfather was an officer?"

"Yes—his brother too; and a good way back on my mother's side we have more fighting blood. I have some letters of my great-great-grandfather, written to his wife from Flanders, where he went with his regiment, the 1st Dragoon Guards."

She left the room, and presently returned with a bundle of old letters, very yellow and frayed, in her hand.

"Oh! are they not old?" she laughed, sitting down upon the rug, and untying the string. "What is this? Oh! listen:

"Cornet Villiers.

Dr. to Henry Tilley.

			£	s.	d.
1760.	Feb. 5.	For a pair of water-gilt Bosses	0	12	0
		For a superfine web sercingle, leathered with neat's leather	0	4	6
1761.	Jan. 10.	For a Rich officer's cap of black and scarlet velvet, embroider'd with gold, and a guard over the Head chac'd & water-gilt &c.	6	16	0
		A green oil cloth cover for Do. lin'd with baize & for a deal box to pack it in	0	1	0

1761.	Jan. 10.	Paid the carriage of the Cap by the coach to	£	s.	d.
		Leeds	0	2	6
			£7	16	0
		Allow'd for Y ^r old boss	0	3	6
		Due to Balance	£7	12	6
9th April, 1762.		Received then the full contents and all demands,			
		“ HENRY TILLERY.			

“ Here is another :

“ Guildford, December 27, 1759.

“ DEAR LOVE,—

“ I doubt not that you will be surprised at never receiving a letter of so long a time from me, but I hope you'll excuse me as we never have been quartered above two or three days at one time at any place, this seven weeks ; nor do we expect to stay here above a month, as we shall relieve the Queen's Dragoon Guards, now on the Coast-duty, near where my uncle lives : but I expect to have the pleasure of seeing you in Yorkshire, for I hope to come a-recruiting in ye spring. My servant asked me leave to go to London for a week, which I have given him. I gave him money to buy a barrel of oysters and pay carriage to Yorkshire, as soon as possible. I shall send you something from London, as I shall ask leave for a day or two to go there, for I am but thirty miles from Town. It is a fine place and a pleasant country that I am quartered in. I command a party of forty men and horses. The troop is divided into three different quarters—this place, Farnham, and Godalming. Cornet Jeffreys desires his compliments to you, and the rest of the gentlemen, though unknown to you. You were acquainted with Jeffreys in Chelmsford—he lived with Oldham in Cope's. My duty to my mother, love to brothers and sisters. Please, Dr. Love, you and my little ones accept the same, and I wish you a happy Christmas and a-many of them, from your affectionate husband,

“ WM. VILLIERS.

“ This place is in Surrey.

“ It is very good writing,” the Princess laughed, “ but the spelling is queer, and half the words abbreviated.”

“ I daresay he could fight,” Dick said, with great contempt on the subject of spelling. “ Go on.”

“Dingen, April 17, 1761.

“DR. LOVE,—

“I have got safe to this side the water. I at this time lie at anchor in the River—

“I cannot make out the name of the river,”
Princess put in—

“and in a few hours disembark and go to the place I have dated my letter from. The men and horses of the party I belong got all safe here but two horses, which died in the passage here, for we had two or three very rough nights, though I never was sick at all. We are got into a very fine country, and the people are very civil, but I don't know one word they say. We are ordered to lie at this place nine days to rest, and then we march for the army, which lies at a place called Hamlin, from which place I will, as soon as I arrive, write to tell you how to direct to me, though I believe I am come too late for fighting, for we are told here that a peace is concluded on. But it is very certain to have a—

“I don't know what that word is,” she broke off,
“‘p-s-a-tion’—Oh! it must mean a passage—yès—

“a passage of arms betwixt the French and our army. I have got a very good and sober servant. He comes from Gisbourne, in our neighbourhood. I'm ordered to get another servant and two more horses, which I shall get in three days, but the fresh servant I only hire from month to month, as he is for nothing but to lead and take care of my bought horses. I assure you, the sea has made such an alteration in me that from eating very little, I am become a *glutton*. I am healthy and very well. I don't know what more to say, as we at present have no news, but I am quartered at a gentleman's house, and the quarter-master says—for he has just been to wait upon me—that I shall always be quartered in such houses on our march till I get to the army, for I do assure you I am at present a very great man, for the colonel has gone forward to join the army, and I am at present the commanding officer of our men and horses, which consist of 230 men and horses, besides two cornets and two quarter-masters, all under my command, and will be, until I join the regiment. I am allowed hay and corn for seven horses every day for nothing. Wine here is no more than ninepence a bottle. Brandy at four shillings a gallon. Eating we don't pay anything for, till we get to the regiment, but wine and brandy we are obliged to carry with us to our quarters, for their beer is worse than water. The beer the common soldiers drink is brewed from nothing but straw.

"S. Wildman is with me and Thomas and David Nuthall and the Lilleys, and almost all the men I enlisted; J. Foster and both Briggs are with me.

"Beg my duty to my mother, and love to brothers and sisters and my little ones. I beg the blessing of God may attend you all is the sincere prayer of your affectionate and loving husband,

"WILLIAM VILLIERS.

"I send this letter back by the captain of the ship that brought me over. My old friend, Major Lichfield, is here, and desires his compliments to you. I have just been on board his ship to breakfast with him. General Douglas commands us all to the army; he is a very good-natured gentleman—it was he that reviewed me on Blackheath when I was in Sir F. Cope's regiment.*

"The next two letters," observed the Princess, as she paused and scanned them carefully, "are from my great-great-grandfather."

"Very likely—go on," that was what Dick usually said when his Princess was talking—"go on."

"Rolstadt, June 12, 1761.

"DEAR LOVE,—

"Since my last, dated 21st May, from Barringtroop, we marched to this place, which is situate but nine English miles from Padarborne. It is a very pleasant country all round us, if ye army had not distressed ye poor inhabitants so much by their being situate in and near this neighbourhood for two campaigns before this. We expect marching from these quarters in a day or two to a place called Dryburg, which is about sixteen English miles from this, where we are to encamp. The army of the allies are to have three different encampments: one commanded by Duke Ferdinand, the others by the Prince Hereditary and General Sporkon, which are to act in three different ways, to observe the movements of the French army. We are very quiet, and by what appears at present, shall continue so, for at this place there is nothing talked of but a peace. A cornet in this country ought to have, besides his pay, four or five hundred a year. We cannot do with less than five horses, and, if we should have a vigorous campaign, I shall be obliged to keep six horses and three servants. I myself keep two servants besides a dragoon at present, which I pay twenty shillings a week to, and two shillings a week to the dragoon, out of my two pounds two a week. I do assure you this place for a gentleman of ye cavalry is the most expensive I ever saw, for no officer in this regiment can live upon less than twice his pay, but all our gen-

* Cope's Foot.

tllemen are men of very great fortunes and never regard the expense, which they are in fact obliged to be at. I have no news at present, but, if anything extraordinary should take place, I will give you a line ; but I cannot think why my brother has not answered any of my letters that I have wrote to him. I beg in your answer to this you will be so good as to let me know the reason. I would write more fully in regard to my affairs but that letters are very apt to miscarry. When you write to me, you must pay the postage out of England or the letter will not come to me. I have my health very well, which I hope you and my children enjoy, which is the constant prayer of your affectionate husband till death,

“ W. LEACH.

“ Direct for me as under :

“ To Cornet Leach, of the first Regiment of Dragoon Guards,
“ With the Allied Army in Germany.

“ N.B.—I beg you will not let one post slip before you write me an answer to this.

“ You may tell Joshuay Andisty that his brother has left the regiment he was in, and they do not know where he is.

“ My duty to my mother, &c.

“ How strange to read all those little tender private details written nearly a hundred-and-twenty years ago,” said the Princess, dreamily. “ I wonder what your letters will read like a hundred-and-twenty years hence, Dick? ”

“ Or your’s? ”

“ Mine ! ” with a wry face. “ Any one who gets hold of my letters to you will be sure your Princess was neither more nor less than a housemaid. I write horribly. But, still, it is strange, is it not? Ah ! ”—holding the yellow-brown carefully-folded paper out at arm’s length—“ how my great-great-grandmother watched for that ! How she kissed it and perhaps cried over it and loved him—‘ her affectionate husband till death.’ He was getting

very home-sick when he wrote that! You see, Dick, it was not 'do this and do that' in those days—it was 'I beg you will not let one post slip.'"

"Why, do I not pay my Princess homage enough?" Dick asked, tenderly.

"Too much, Dick," with a quick sigh. "Well, do you care to hear any more—I believe there is some account of an engagement in one. Yes, here it is:—

"House of Hanover Camp, July 17, 1761.

"DEAR BROTHER,—

"I take this opportunity of writing to acquaint you that yesterday we had an engagement with the French army, a few miles from the ground we are now encamped on, which is the same ground we were on before the action began. On ye 15th, at 9 o'clock at night, we were ordered to strike our tents and march, which we did. The French army lay in the front of us, and they marched off from their left a few hours before we did. Yesterday morning, at day-break, they began their attack, which lasted till six or seven o'clock. Our cannons and small arms played very brisk and continued till near nine, when the French found it too warm to stand and were obliged to retreat with great loss, the ground being covered with dead. The loss on our side is very few, their loss in killed and wounded and prisoners amounts to upwards of 8,000 men, 11 pieces of cannon, four of which are 18-pounders. Amongst their killed are several officers of distinction, the report is that we have two lieut.-generals of theirs prisoners. As to anything more, I must refer you to the newspapers, only that if they had not retreated when they did, they would have lost a body of 6,000 men more than they did; and that this battle has added great honour to Prince Ferdinand, for their army are at this time three times our numbers. I am very well and safe. From, dear brother,

"Your most affectionate,

"WM. LEACH.

"My love to my wife and children.

"Duty to mother and love to sisters, and please accept the same yourself."

“What battle would that be Dick?—Minden?” *

“I believe Minden was in 1759. It must have been a pretty sharp engagement—how many did the French lose?”

“Killed, wounded, and taken prisoners, 8,000, 11 pieces of cannon—four 18-pounders. I wonder what they would have thought of the 81-ton gun and the ‘Devastation?’”

“I wonder what fighting will be like in another hundred years?” Dick laughed.

“Scientific slaughter, I should think.”

“Well, finish the letters.”

The girl turned them over in silence for a few minutes, heedless of Dick’s injunction to go on, and then she suddenly gathered them up, with a resolute face. “I can’t read any more,” with a gasp of pain, “there is only parting and poverty. I do not find either subject pleasant just now, they both cost me so much.”

“Sing to me then,” he answered. “I want you to sing to me as much as possible this week, Princess, for heaven only knows when I shall hear you again.”

“After this week, never any more, Dick,” she told him, with grave sadness.

“Oh! nonsense!—are all the foolish fears back again?”

* *The Battle of Villenhausen, July 16th, 1761.*

“I do not think,” she said, simply, “that they have ever been away.”

And then she sang for him a tender song, with a passionately pathetic refrain—

Oh! my love, I loved her so,
My love that loved me years ago.

That song had lived in Dick's memory for months; would he ever quite forget it while he lived?

“I cannot sing!” she cried, with feverish impatience, rising from the piano and going back to her place at Dick's feet. “I can do nothing but dread—Oh! the future, how afraid of it I am. I wonder, Dick,” with sudden wistfulness, “how soon it will take you to forget me?”

“When the bullet goes through my heart,” Dick answered, earnestly, “I *may* forget you.”

And the Princess laid her head back against the heart which was to beat for her always, with a smile, and was comforted.

And the days crept over, until the last had come. Jack Villiers had left the pair pretty much to themselves, feeling that, except at meals, he was an unwelcome addition to their company. Dick took his Princess for long walks—he had now no fear of writs, and they were positively showered upon him—he showed her all the little sights of

the place, and she helped him to buy such of his outfit as he had not procured in town; and, in time, the last afternoon came—the very last time that she would put on her hat and go out with him; the last time they would go into a shop like two children and buy *nougât*, or toffee—the last time.

“Dick,” she said, when she came into the sitting-room, dressed for walking, “let me have the cross.”

“Yes, child, of course.”

It was an “Iron Cross of Prussia,” which some friend of Dick’s had found in Berlin and which the Princess had vainly coveted for some time.

“Buy me a steel chain to wear with it. I want to have one of your choosing,” she said, softly.

And so they went to some dozen shops before they could get what they wanted; but they got it at last, and went back to the hotel together.

“Dick,” she said, as they reached the door, “you won’t have champagne to-night?”

“Oh! we must, child—the last night.”

“Yes, I know,” impatiently, “and then you will drink to our next merry meeting, and I cannot bear it—indeed I cannot, dear.”

“I won’t, indeed.”

“Not one word?”

“I promise.”

Dick kept his promise faithfully, but just as he raised the first glass to his lips, he looked full at her ; the girl threw her glass down and, with a passionate burst of tears, rushed into the inner room, weeping as if her heart would break. But presently, mindful of her promise to be brave, she went back and held her glass for Dick to fill.

“To our next merry meeting,” she cried, courageously.

Her tears were all gone, there still lived in the girl some of the cool determined spirit of her crusading fore-elders, and she had, for Dick’s sake, forced the scalding drops back—it must have been—even to her heart. And so, on that last night, she sang and laughed, wearing a brave smile to hide the utter agony within her.

“I want you to keep my helmet for me, whilst I am in India,” Dick said, during the course of the evening.

“Very well !” she answered, “I will take care of it.”

The moments sped quickly on and midnight had come. More than once Jack Villiers had dropped asleep before either of the others thought of bed.

“I don’t think it’s wise to sit up all night,” Jack said, at last, sleepily.

“No, no—I am going to bed at once,” the Princess answered.

She made no attempt to undress, but threw herself on her bed and drew a fur rug over her, lying listening to the sounds about the house until all was silent. Still she did not sleep: she heard the clock in the hall strick one—two—three; then, very soon, the sound of the boots—she supposed it was the boots—hammering at Dick’s door. Evidently Dick had been already up when the servant went, for when she, a few minutes later, entered the sitting-room, he was there, trying awkwardly to fasten his belts.

“Let me do that,” she said, hastily.

“Are you there, my darling?” he asked, turning quickly at the sound of her voice.

She fastened the belts in silence, her shaking fingers scarcely able to perform the task. She spoke no word, only her face grew more and more deathly pale, her eyes more intensely dark, the weight of pain on her heart more and more crushing; once she looked at him, but what she saw in his face made her keep her eyes resolutely away from it, was she not nerving herself to get through the next hour bravely? But the silence was broken at last, when she saw him trying to force some things into a bag, more than it would hold.

"Let me do that," she said, calmly, taking them out of his hands.

She dared not look at him, the hands trembling so nervously before her told her what she would see if she should look up into his face, and a great tear which fell with a splash upon her wrist warned her that she must be strong, for Dick's strength was fast deserting him.

"It is snowing fast," Dick said, turning to the window, and drawing aside the curtain.

"Is it?" said the girl; her voice sounded almost indifferent, so great was her effort to keep her tears back. Oh! if he would but go now, she thought, passionately; now, without a word.

But Dick did not. He crossed the room to her side, and stood watching her packing the bag.

"Linda!" he said, using her name almost for the first time since he had known her—for he had passed from "Miss Villiers" to "My Princess"—"Darling, it has come."

She dropped the bag and its contents, and turned to him, looking then with sad hungry eyes into his white quivering face.

"You—won't—forget—me," she managed to say; "you'll—think of me—sometimes."

But Dick never answered; he took her in his arms for a moment, as if he would never, never

let her go again. The girl felt her head swimming and her heart sinking yet lower—then her kisses, the last she would ever give him, fell upon the brass guard of his helmet, and its icy coldness brought her to herself.

It was all over then—at the door he turned and looked at her for the last time. A pair of blue eyes beneath an Indian helmet, a pair of dark ones under a mass of red-brown hair, and in both such dire misery, that I can write no more. The door closed, and he was gone.

She heard him clatter down the stairs and tramp along the stone-floored hall, then she ran to the window and flung it open wide for yet the very last look. The tall, soldierly figure passed out of sight amid the driving snow; but the girl sank on her knees and stayed there, half unconscious of aught but that the end had come. Jack, coming out of his room, found her there, wet with snow and almost frozen to death.

“Come in, old woman,” he said, persuasively; “you will get your death.”

“I am past that, Jack,” she answered.

“Am I to give him any message?” for he was going up to the barracks for Dick’s cabin trunk.

“Tell him I am not crying or anything; that

"I'm quite quiet and cool," she answered, and turned to the window again.

Oh! why did she want to hear it? What was she listening for? It came presently,

We twa hae paddl't in the burn,
From early morn till cline;
But we've wandered mony a weary foot,
Sin' the days of Auld Lang Syne.

"I feel nothing!" cried Dick's Princess, stretching her cold hands to the wild snow; "I am past feeling."

But it was not so when Jack returned, on his way to the station.

"Let me go, too," she pleaded.

"No," he said, soothingly; "poor Dick's awfully cut up; and you'll break down, and make it harder for him."

"I am as cool as—as an iceberg," she cried. "I must go, Jack."

So he let her go.

They were too late to see him again—the doors of the station were closed. The cabman drove them up close beside a low railing, from whence they could see the long train. They could see three or four officers of other regiments, who had come to say a word of farewell; but she could not see Dick. Once, amid her tears, she saw the waving of a handkerchief, and wondered if it was

his? The band struck up again, and the train moved. One by one the instruments ceased—there was an attempt at a cheer, which ended in a huge sob, and the Royal Regiment of Cuirassiers was gone; they had passed away into the distance, and Linda Villiers stood in the dim grey mist of that December dawn, alone. She might have cried:

My eyes are full of tears, my heart of love,
My heart is breaking, and my eyes are dim;
And I am all aweary of my life.



BY-AND-BYE;

OR, HOW RICHARD CARTER SHOT AT A PIGEON AND
BROUGHT DOWN A CROW.

AND by-and-bye Dick's letters to his Princess grew shorter and more constrained! With each one the girl lost her pluck and her brave on-looking to the future. She was troubled at the change, though she hardly knew in what it consisted.

At first Dick's letters had been one passionate outpouring of an imprisoned spirit—imprisoned in that huge gaol known as India. Oh! how he hated India and everything Indian. He should die, he cried out, away from everyone he loved; he had no one to care for him, no one to think of him. He had heard of the splendours of Indian scenery, of the magnificent profuseness of nature there. Bah! it was hideous, hideous, hideous—a dirty, dusty, dismal, deserted, miserable hole, something like Aldershot, only, compared to India, Aldershot was a perfect paradise. He believed there was fine scenery in Kashmir, but all that Dick had seen on his march to Unapore was hideous, hideous, hideous—that was what India was in Dick's opinion. He didn't know

which he hated most—Bombay; the railway carriages; the bungalows, where they put up for the night; the half-barrels, which were provided as baths, and against the unfinished edges of which he had nearly broken his legs twice, or the station at which they ultimately arrived. He hated it all! If he had a preference, it was for Bombay, because it was so many miles nearer to England than Unapore.

For a month or two his detestation of India and everything Indian increased. He wrote to Linda that he had been to a ball at which there were thirteen ladies present, balanced by two hundred-and-fifty men; the *belle* was Mrs. Newcombe, a fact which so utterly disgusted him that he went home before the end of the first dance, and gave Indian society up as a failure.

Then he got leave and went to Simla, where the ladies came under his especial censure: "I don't like the women here at all," he wrote to his Princess, "they are vulgar to a degree: they call you by your surname and talk very loudly, they smoke and drink B. and S. and positively guzzle champagne whenever they can get it, as for their morals, they are *nil*! Here they are during all the hot weather carrying on no end of a life, while their poor devils of husbands are frizzling down in the plains. I cannot do with them after a pet like you," followed

by a good deal of tenderness, which the Princess read and smiled at, and, worst of all, was foolish enough to believe.

And then Dick fell ill—his letters were brimful of that one subject! His leave was almost up and he should have to go back to Unapore and die—there was not the least doubt about the dying! The men were dying off like sheep, the only times the band was heard was when the “Dead March” was played—that, the Princess gathered, was about every hour or so. Three officers had died within a few hours of one another—to be sure one was in consequence of a fall from his horse, and another had steadily killed himself by drinking, she had seen that in the papers—the colonel had had a very bad go of fever, Creyke was very ill, and Dickson, so Dick had heard, was a perfect wreck. Poor Dick!—in one week more his leave would be over, and he must make up his mind to go back to Unapore and die.

Ah! how she wept over that letter, with a wild sense of rebellion against the ill-fortune which had made her anything but a great heiress, who could have given her soldier-hero all he wished in a country more suited to his tastes than India had proved to be. Poor Princess! Alas! she had a passionate adoration and fair prospects, but pas-

sionate adoration is unfortunately not good to eat, neither will it provide shelter and raiment; and, as for prospects, she knew as most people do—or, if they don't, they will very soon find out—that it is but ill work waiting for dead men's shoes. And so she could only weep over Dick's letters, and gather such papers as might interest him, or make her eyes ache by writing long letters, telling him over and over again how she was always thinking of him all the day—aye, and for the matter of that—half the night too.

By the next mail came a still more disastrous letter! His health was worse: so ill, indeed, was he that a medical board was to sit on him at his rooms with a view to further leave. At the end of that epistle was a postscript to the effect that the board had obtained for him four months' sick leave. Once more her spirits rose, she breathed freely; she went about the house singing like a lark, so glad to heart was she that her boy had been successful. She carried the letter about with her, she read and re-read it, she talked to the photograph she wore in her locket, and she wrote Dick the longest letter she had ever written to him or to anyone else, during her whole life. She took his helmet out of the case and cleaned it carefully, until it shone like burnished gold. Never

had Dick's soldier servant bestowed such tender attention upon it. She put it on her own head and looking in the glass, tried to cheat herself into the belief that they were not dark eyes which she beheld beneath it but the true blue orbs, which she had seen there aforetime—that the heavy knot of brown hair which tilted it up behind was not there in reality, but only the back of Dick's close-cropped head. It was of no use, the face under the helmet was that of the Princess, and Dick's was thousands of miles away amid the lovely scenery of Simla—yes, he had retracted his first opinion somewhat, and admitted that Simla was lovely. She fell then to wondering what was he doing? Thinking of her, of course—thinking of his Princess, and calculating how soon he could save sufficient money to take him back to England and her. Oh! Princess! Princess! why did you go about all that brilliant September day, with the self-same song upon your lips, which Dick had cursed so heartily on Christmas Eve?—

In the gloaming, oh! my darling, think not bitterly of me,
Though I passed away in silence, left you lonely, set you free;
For my heart was crushed with longing, what had been could never be,
It was best to leave you thus, dear, best for you and best for me.

Why did your heart's gladness find its vent in words like those? Could it be that they were a fore-shadowing of what was to come, the first of

the by-and-bye? Presently a letter came, not less profuse in terms of endearment than the former ones had been, and yet the scalding tears rushed into the girl's eyes as she read it, a blank pain settled down upon her heart, never to be quite lifted any more—she could not have told what manner of pain it was nor why it had come, therefore I use the word “blank” advisedly. The letter was loving, but it was evidently written in great haste; it ended “God speed my darling,” and yet, in his carelessness, he had blotted the words. He wanted this, he wanted that; Princess was to do this, to get that. Why should it pain her so sorely? She could not tell, it was the undefinable *something* which had begun the *by-and-bye*!

Amongst other news which this letter contained was that there was to be a fancy-ball, to which Dick was going in the character of the Earl of Leicester, “of the time of Queen Elizabeth, you know,” he added. Ah! surely that was the unkindest sting of all—“the time of Queen Elizabeth.” What had come to Dick that he took it for granted that she did not know to what period of history *the* Earl of Leicester belonged? And so the pain settled down upon her heart and stayed there!

The bright September days crept over and chill October came in, but there were no letters from

Dick. The girl fretted and worried and pined to know what could have chanced. Surely he must be ill that he did not write. She got the helmet out and cleaned it again, she looked up his old letters and read them a dozen times over—all of them save the last one, there was but one line of that she cared to remember, that was the “God speed my darling” at the end.

The days crept on. Twenty of October’s thirty-one sons had come and gone, the Indian mails were in, but there was no letter from Dick. All that day the Princess stayed in the house, lest the precious missive might come, and coming, lie one moment unread; but no, it came not—

It came not, no, it came not,
The night came on alone;
The little stars sat one by one,
Each on its golden throne.

So the Princess went to her bed and slept, for a wonder, long and heavily; and towards morning she had a dream. She dreamed that at last the longed-for letter had arrived, and that it was but a letter of farewell, conveying the announcement of his approaching marriage. She awoke with a gasp of relief that it was, after all, *only* a dream. How could an idea so idiotic have got into her brain, she wondered? Dick marry! The idea was too absurd. What, to one of the women who “are

vulgar to a degree, who call men by their surnames and talk very loudly, whose morals are *nil*, who drink B. and S. and positively guzzle champagne, whenever they can get it?" How supremely absurd to think of Dick's marrying one of those.

And yet the impression produced by the dream could not be shaken off, it was so distinct: she had seen the letter so plainly—the bluish foreign paper stamped with the crest of the regiment, Dick's careless yet firm writing—it had been all too real. There was only one thing unlike Dick—its utter coldness. Whatever his failings had been—and, dearly as she loved him, she had not been blind to them—no! though she had loved his very faults, because they were his, coldness had not been one of them. She tried to argue herself into the belief that, since dreams always go by the rule of contrary, Dick's next letter would bring her good news—perhaps! Ah! the thought which flashed across her mind made her very heart stand still for a moment: perhaps he had somehow contrived to get leave and was coming home. And so, amid hopes and fears, the next few days slipped over, and at last the letter appeared.

"Its a very thin one," murmured the Princess, ruefully, as she opened it.

The first thing that caught her eye was the

end. No "God speed my darling," not even the more usual termination, "Your own Dick"—no, nothing of his usual tenderness. It was a new sensation which thrilled through her heart as her eyes fell upon the four words which concluded the letter, for they were, "Yours truly, Richard Carter!"

The by-and-bye had come!

It is not necessary to give the letter in detail. It was incoherent, *very*. The handwriting was shaky, the tone half-tender, half-bland! The latter was indeed one of the expressions he used: "You don't know how it pains me to tell you thus blandly—"

"Blandly," repeated the Princess, with a passionate sob, "fancy Dick bland—to me."

And what was it that he told her, thus blandly?

It was merely the fulfilment of the dream which she had not been able to banish from her mind. Dick had—well not exactly forgotten her, but he had made up his mind that the only way out of his difficulties was by a rich marriage, and so he was going to be married!

The lady—he called her *a lady*, so the Princess concluded that she was not a girl—was called McPhearson! She was rich! She was handsome! She was loving! She was going to pay off all his debts—or at least, her father was going to do so,

which amounted to the same thing! Her people lived in London, and she was staying in India for a little while with a married sister. Dick was quite sure if the Princess knew her she would like her awfully. Linda was not so sure of it—she was rather doubtful on the subject, but that was nothing; and that was all—excepting “yours truly, Richard Carter,” over which the Princess wept most bitterly of all. And then, when her first grief had passed somewhat, she began to put two and two together, to think the matter over. She was not exactly a fool and she knew life pretty well, indeed—considering her short experience of two-and-twenty years—better than most people.

The lady was Scotch! There could be no doubt of that. Her father lived in London—then what was she doing out in India? She must have gone out on “spec,” husband-hunting! The Princess wondered was she oldish? Probably she was older than Dick or he would never surely have spoken of her as “this lady!” And Dick owed some four or five thousand pounds, which Mr. McPhearson was going to pay! To the Princess’s tolerably keen mind that hadn’t a Scotch sound about it! If Dick had been a nobleman she could understand some rich city man “shelling out,” but for a simple

sub. in a cavalry regiment—why, it was absurd—it hadn't a Scotch sound about it.

The result of her calculations was that she wrote and recommended Dick to get his debts paid before he was married.

“Ladies,” she wrote, “who are young, rich, and handsome, have no need to go out to India husband-hunting, unless there is something very very shady in the background. If she has gone all the way to India to catch a husband, I don't believe her father will be willing to pay four or five thousand pounds for him—it hasn't a Scotch sound about it, Dick.”

But Dick did not wait to receive her advice. His anxiety to secure his pigeon was too great, and it was not many weeks after she had received the news of his intended matrimonial venture, that she saw an announcement in the *Times*—

On the 7th ult., at Simla, by the Rev. ———, Richard Carter, Esquire (the Cuirassiers), of Breakdown Castle, County Cork, to Lily, youngest daughter of Andrew McPhearson, Esquire, of 17 Tollington Crescent, W.

And so it was all over—the bullet, which was, in piercing Dick Carter's heart, to make him forget his Princess, had found a billet—perhaps neither of them had looked forward to its being a bullet of gold. Well! the end had come: Linda Villiers might sit down and weep her very heart out, or

laugh and forget him. Dick wouldn't care which—at least, that was what she told herself, and she had a fair knowledge of life—considering her years.

During the week which followed, she got very tired of seeing that same announcement—in every paper in which the notice of a marriage could be put was it found: *Times*, *Telegraph*, *Standard*, *Daily News*, *Illustrated London News*, the *Graphic*—nay, when one day turning over some numbers of the *Queen*, she came upon the following, over which she laughed out aloud—and, be it known, she had of late done very little in the way of laughter. It came under the heading of the “Upper Ten Thousand at Home and Abroad”:—

A marriage has been arranged between Mr. Richard Carter, Cuirassiers, of Breakdown Castle, County Cork, and the youngest daughter of Mr. Andrew McPhearson, of 17 Tollington Crescent, Kensington, W.

Poor forsaken Princess! She laughed till she cried, and she cried till her head ached, and then she went to bed and sobbed herself to sleep—but she cut the announcement out and put it away with that of the marriage.

“The Upper Ten Thousand”—no, I won't be quite sure that it was not under “Marriages in High Life,” but any lady reader will know—it makes no matter, for both were equally absurd. The Princess was certainly anxious to know which of the two families had inserted the numerous an-

nouncements of the marriage. One of them must be very proud of the alliance—of that, there could be no doubt. She rather fancied it was on the McPhearson side, for she had an idea that the Carters had not a great deal of money to spare—at least, Dick had always said so.

And that was the end of it all. Dick Carter had found himself a bride in India, and the girl whom he had called his Princess had to get over the change as best she could—she did get over it in time. The old obstinate spirit, which had fought so bravely in the Crusades under Cœur de Lion, lived in the girl still; the cool determined brave heart with which her grandsire fought through the Peninsular—for the Villiers had all been gallant soldiers for generations—which carried him into Egypt (one of Abercrombie's chosen staff), and to Waterloo with Picton, it lived again in the girl. She was heart-broken, ill, weary of her life: she had lost what she valued most upon earth but she struggled on—on to the time when the fair prospects had become substantial realities; to the time when she could look back to the old days and see only the brightness; when she could admit that, as they were, things were best; when, thinking of Dick tenderly still, she could bear to listen to the strains of that old Scotch melody, which had wrung her

heart so sorely as they floated to her, through the driving snow, that chill December morning, when she and Dick had said "good-bye," to meet on this side of the grave never more—though then they had both looked forward to the by-and-bye.

But that was not quite the end. Not many months after Dick Carter entered the bonds of holy matrimony a series of announcements appeared in the papers, which made the Princess—I call her by the familiar name still—come to the conclusion that it was from the McPhearson side that the numerous notices of the marriage had emanated—not that this one was in connection with a wedding, on the contrary. It ran thus:

On the 25th, at 17, Tollington Crescent, Kensington, W., Andrew McPhearson, Esq., aged 80 years. Dearly loved and deeply regretted. Indian papers please copy.

"How strange," remarked the Princess, "to say 'Indian papers please copy,' when he has two daughters married in India."

Yes! It was perhaps a little strange, and something else rather astonished her—his age. Eighty years! She came to the conclusion that—and all her information was by that means—Mrs. Richard Carter was in all probability a good deal older than her husband, who was seven-and-twenty. To be sure Mr. McPhearson *might* have married late in life, and "Lily" *might* be the youngest of a very large

family ; but, still, the chances were ten to one against it. Of that, however, she had no means of knowing, except she had troubled herself to write to some of her friends in India, which she did not do. No ; she saw the notices of the old man's death in the papers with a sigh and a certain feeling of sadness.

Dick had soon come into his kingdom ! No doubt he had quite forgotten her by this time, she thought, quite ceased to regret her, that is. That he could forget her was, of course, utterly impossible—as long as he lived, he could never remember leaving for India without a thought of the girl who had risen at four o'clock in the morning and bidden him adieu, to the strains of “Auld Lang Syne !”

And time crept on. It was some months after the death of old Mr. McPhearson that the Princess was in London with her mother, on their way to the sunny Rhineland. They stayed in the great city, to see the Academy and one or two theatres, at one of which they witnessed that old-world comedy, “She Stoops to Conquer !” The play began.

“I wish people would come earlier,” remarked the Princess, plaintively, as she rose, for about the twentieth time, to allow some people to pass.

“The places on this row are all filled now,” returned the mother, consolingly.

At the last comers she scarcely glanced, except

to notice that one was a tall lady in a grey opera cloak, the other a young man, apparently her son.

The play went on, and to it the Princess gave her undivided attention until it was ended.

“Splendid play,” she observed, when it was over.

It was to be succeeded by a farce, and during the interval the audience behaved as an audience at a theatre generally does behave. The men got up and moved about, speaking to their acquaintances, the usual trays of ices and wine were sent round, women criticised other women’s dresses, there was general bustle and hum of voices. Suddenly the Princess became aware that a gentleman had come behind her, and was speaking to the lady in the grey opera cloak.

“Oh! we are in Tollington Crescent,” she said, evidently in answer to some question.

Tollington Crescent! She pricked up her ears immediately; it was a magic sound to her. She turned her head, and saw that the lady was in mourning, then she turned it away again.

“Oh, my mother’s gone down to Exmouth!” she said—again the Princess had missed the question—“my brother’s got a little son. She has gone down to see her grandson.”

“But your brother has been married some time,” said the gentleman; “this is not the first?”

“Oh, no ; but the first boy—the son and heir.”

The last words were, however, spoken in a tone which plainly showed that the addition, “and heir,” were intended as a joke, and meant to be received as such.

“Ah ! the first that counts, I suppose ?”

“Er—yes !”

A moment's silence, then the lady spoke again,

“I have not seen you for some time.”

“No ; I have been out of town for six weeks.”

“Really ! I thought that perhaps you had already gone to India.”

“Oh, no.”

“When do you go ?”

“In about six weeks. And have you heard from Laura and Lily lately ?”

“Oh, yes ; they are both very well.”

“Still at Simla ?”

“Oh, yes.”

If the Princess had been a fainting sort of young lady, she would probably have fainted ; but, as she was not, she did nothing of the kind. She turned rather pale, and a deadly sickness crept over her ; but she preserved sufficient presence of mind to carefully examine the appearance of the lady from Tollington Crescent ! Now, up to that moment,

she had never for one instant doubted the reality of the riches in the McPhearson family; but, after five minutes' survey of her neighbour's dress, they took unto themselves wings and fled away—as the reader may have known reputed riches do before to-day.

Mrs. Richard Carter's sister—for, of course, she was a sister—had taken off, or rather thrown back her cloak, after a fashion ladies have when a theatre becomes too warm; the Princess was glad of it, for it gave her a more favourable opportunity of studying her person. She was a tall woman, perhaps six or seven-and-forty—she might be a little less, but that was what she looked. She had—the Princess began with the crown of her head and worked slowly downwards—she had SCOTCH stamped on her! Her hair was of that peculiar hue just now so fashionable, and known as “cardinal red;” not ordinary red hair, but a deep scarlet. By way of a head-dress, she had a bit of rusty-black feather, what, I am told, is best described as feather-trimming, and which, as the Princess told herself scornfully, she wouldn't have picked up in the street, much less have worn it about her person. Her face was long, with an undeniably good nose, high cheek-bones, a hard mouth, and lack-lustre eyes of the description known as “boiled

gooseberries;" it was a face without any softness in it, which might, perhaps, have been accounted for by the brick-dust colour of the complexion and the scarcity of eye-brows and lashes—it might be that the Princess was a little prejudiced!

But to continue: Mr. Richard Carter's sister wore a gown of some thin black material, "not worth ten shillings," Princess said afterwards. The bodice was cut square—it was cut very square: so square, that, had the wearer been a lady of Venus-like proportions, it might have been thought by a fastidious person to be cut too square. As it was, the Princess's eyes beheld a broad expanse of fleshless bony chest, which absolutely made her shiver. "It was like a dead woman's neck!" she said afterwards.

The sleeves of this gown did not come down to the waist, but ended at the elbow—probably they were what ladies describe as elbow-sleeves—at all events a pair of very sharp angles protruded under the frilling which fastened them off. On her arms she wore black mittens of open-work. Now, I take it, that, possessed of a pair of beautiful hands and arms, a lady can not do better than pretend to cover them with open-work mittens. Mrs. Richard Carter's sister had got the mittens, but, alas! she had neither the beautiful arms nor hands. The

wrists were long and large, the hands had no breed about them; the nails were square, and they were not *very* clean, moreover they had those white blemishes upon them which are commonly known as “gifts”—

A gift on the thumb is sure to come;
A gift on the finger is sure to linger.

If there be any truth in old sayings, Mrs. Richard Carter's sister had a great many presents in store. Not only had the nails “gifts” on them, but the surrounding skin had grown over them so as to almost hide the half-moons which most people admire. Not only were the nails objectionable, but the fingers also, for they turned up with a thick lump of flesh beyond the nail, and gave them the appearance of being bitten. She wore a considerable quantity of rings, but there was not—Princess especially noticed that—a diamond amongst them, or, indeed, one of any value. She thought of the filbert nails and the four or five valuable rings hidden away beneath her own gloves!

On one arm—no bailiff's man ever took more careful account of the knick-knacks of a house than the Princess did of this lady's personal adornments—on one arm she wore a fourpenny black snake bangle, on the other a heavy bracelet of gold! She took especial notice of that bracelet—

it was a huge onyx, as large as a walnut, and set in "a broad band of gold." She knew, as most people do, who have given their attention to such things, that the onyx, like the amethyst, is not a very valuable stone, and when set in gold of good quality diamonds and pearls are used also—there were neither diamonds nor pearls in the bracelet, so the Princess came to the natural conclusion that the gold massive setting hailed—perhaps from Abyssinia.

"I don't believe," she said afterwards, "that there is any money at all."

"Cannot be much," answered the mother.

So the Princess went back to her hotel and thought it all over. What a strange coincidence, that she should be thus brought in contact with the sister of the woman who had succeeded in marrying Dick, and still more strange that by her conversation she should have known who she was.

The result of her cogitations was, that on the following morning she suggested that they should take a hansom as far as Somerset House and just have a look at the old gentleman's will.

Her suggestion was soon carried into effect. They drove through the grand quadrangle, and were set down at the will department. On entering, they were informed that they must purchase

a shilling stamp, and then she was given a big book, and told to look out the name. She had but small difficulty in finding it :

Andrew McPhearson,
17, Tollington Crescent,
Kensington, W.

There it stood.

Then they were directed to the reading-room, and told that the will should be sent in a few minutes. They found the room, in which were a few chairs, a bench or two, a long table, and two grave-looking clerks, watching to see that the documents were not tampered with.

And presently *the* will appeared.

“You must read it at the table,” said one of the grave clerks, as the Princess stretched out her hand to take it.

“Oh ! must I ? I did not know,” she said, apologetically. “*Under* twenty thousand pounds,” she said, with a little gasp, to the mother.

There was the usual legal preamble as to the soundness of the testator’s mind, then everything—“all my houses, lands, furniture, books, pictures, carriages, horses, domestic animals, and things”—was left to the wife for life, with the exception of the sum of one thousand pounds, to be paid at once to the trustees of his granddaughter,

Mary Bagot, the interest of which was to be applied for her schooling and maintenance.

"I don't like that word 'schooling,'" said the mother, critically.

"It has rather a third-rate ring about it," replied the Princess, continuing her perusal of the will.

At his wife's death or marriage the testator directed that to each of his daughters, Marion Bagot, Janet Neville, and Laura Ashburnham, he gave the sum of two thousand pounds, to be invested for them—though only with their written consent—by the trustees named in the will, the interest to be paid to them, or only upon their written receipt. In the case of any of them dying without children, their money was to return to such brothers and sisters as might be living or have left children. To Mary Adelaide Lucy, if, at the time of her mother's marriage or death, she should be unmarried, he gave *three* thousand pounds; but if she should be married, she was only to receive two thousand, as her sisters—in either case, less one hundred pounds "had in anticipation."

"Bless me," the Princess ejaculated, blankly, "whatever can that mean?"

"To take her out to India, of course," returned the mother, "and little enough, too."

“It wouldn’t buy her outfit,” gasped the girl. But to continue:

To his son, Donald, the testator bequeathed the sum of one thousand pounds, unrestricted (at his mother’s death, that is to say). To his son, McIvor, the sum of one thousand pounds, less three hundred “had in anticipation.” The remainder of the money to be equally divided amongst his six children.

“And that is all,” said the Princess, “but look, it says ‘late of Calcutta;’ I wonder what he has been?”

“He has evidently made his money himself, and he does not intend some idle extravagant fellows to marry his daughters and spend it,” Mrs. Villiers replied.

The Princess turned the document over thoughtfully. “I wonder which is the codicil?” she said, aloud.

“There is not one.”

“But it says the ‘Will and Codicil.’”

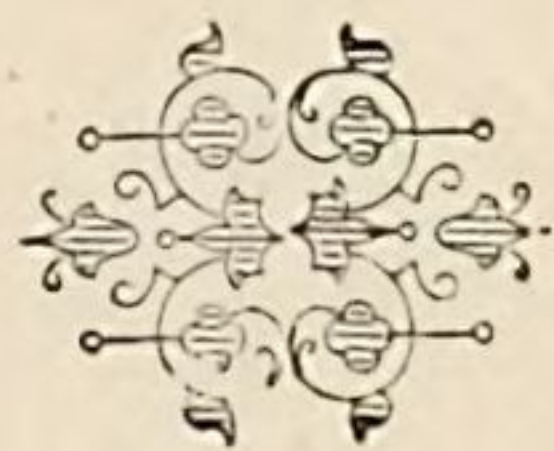
“I think,” put in one of the grave personages at the end of the table, “that it is merely a clerical error, but I will inquire.”

It was merely “a clerical error.”

Princess thanked him, and said “good morning.” She did not speak until they had got half-way across the quadrangle.

“Then when her mother dies—which may be twenty years hence—she will have, at the outside, about a hundred-and-forty pounds a year strictly tied up to herself—Dick being able to touch neither principal nor interest—and if she dies without children, it goes back to her family. Of course she *may* have money of her own; but, no—if that were so, he would not have provided the other thousand. No! a hundred-and-forty pounds a year! I wonder if he is very fond of her? He didn’t use to like red-haired women! If not—why I should have been the better match by far—but then, to be sure, I had no money then.”

The Princess’s money had come, as many things do come in this world, too late. Oh, the pity of it! — Oh, the pity of it!



SUPERSEDED.

CHAPTER I.

SHE was always called "Pretty Polly." When she first came from school (that grand London school, where the terms were a hundred a-year, *with* extras) her mother made an effort—not a small one, for when Mrs. Hugh Antrobus made an effort it was usually one which might be classified as prodigious—to have her called by her proper name of Mary! Perhaps that was one of the very few instances on record in which an effort of Mrs. Hugh's had proved a failure; but a failure it undoubtedly was, and a very signal one, too. No one could, or would remember to call her anything but "Polly;" and so, at last, Mrs. Hugh gave it up, and even fell back herself into the old familiar habit of calling her eldest daughter "Polly."

Polly's father was a lawyer, not a particularly distinguished one—indeed there were people in Blankhampton ill-natured enough to say what money he had he had not come by in too honest

a fashion; but that is rather beside the question. Certain it is, that Mr. Antrobus was a lawyer, and hardly at the top of the tree; he had married a lady whose father was in the cotton-spinning way, without much money, but with remarkably large ideas. One of Mrs. Hugh's ideas was that Polly was the most utterly beautiful young woman who had ever been born—many mothers think the same; another, that Polly was destined to make a brilliant matrimonial alliance—Mrs. Hugh never said anything so common-place as marriage. Having made up her mind on those two important points, Mrs. Hugh felt that Polly would have small opportunity of encompassing that desirable end so long as they remained in the house at forty pounds rent, which they had occupied since their marriage; so she cast about in the neighbourhood of Blankhampton, and finally decided upon the River House as a suitable abode.

Now, the River House was quite the best in the vicinity, and was, in fact, a mansion in miniature.

“It will suit us exactly, Hugh,” she said, when they had finally arranged with the landlord, and were inspecting it with a view to re-decoration; “a charming hall; and these glass doors will keep the vestibule and upper gallery as warm as

possible. And the library—I should think we should have enough books to fill up the shelves, Hugh! As for the dining-room, it is a superb apartment; we shall require nothing but a carpet—and really, Hugh, I think we might afford a Turkey! The drawing-room: ah! the girls must look after this; Mary”—she was as yet in the Mary period—“Mary will be able to exercise her ingenuity. Back-stairs *and* servants’-hall: well, Hugh, when we can afford a billiard-table, this will be the very place to put it in.”

She had probably forgotten that in a billiard-room a side-light is objectionable; perhaps she had never known it: but that is not *apropos* of the subject. Upon one point she was right—inside and out the River House was all that could be desired. It stood in the midst of tastefully laid-out grounds, sloping in terraces down to the river’s bank, or rather to the public promenade which led to the city, half-a-mile away. Not quite so far off, in the opposite direction, were the Cavalry Barracks, from whence Mrs. Hugh—though she did not say so—thought it not improbable Polly’s splendid match might come.

In due time the Antrobus family removed to the River House, and Polly began to feel she had taken her proper position in the world. Now

that her home was a mansion in miniature, with a servants' hall, a housekeeper's-room, a courtyard, and stabling for twelve horses, she felt she could invite, or, at least, feel equal to inviting, any of the city heiresses or noblemen's daughters with whom she had associated at Miss Neville's. True, there was only one nobleman's daughter in that establishment: her father was an Irish earl, and not even a representative peer; her dresses were always shabby, and her bills were a long time unpaid. And equally true was it that the Antrobuses could have done without a servants' hall; and had not a housekeeper to occupy the room set apart for her; nor got horses to fill the stables. Still, the stables, and the housekeeper's room, and the servants' hall were indisputable facts, just as it was that she had been at school with an earl's daughter, and Polly felt that the several circumstances added to her dignity not a little.

And so Mrs. Hugh received her friends in the big drawing-room with bland complacency, and Polly swept her trains along the polished floors of the vestibule and passages as if she had been accustomed to *parqueterie* all her life; while the younger girls, To-To and Baby, narrowly escaped breaking their necks by daring rambles on the roof itself.

It was April when they entered upon their new domain: soft balmy weather, so that Polly was able to parade about the garden paths in an evening, with a scarlet shawl twisted about her shoulders and a natty little sailor hat, with a ribbon of the same colour, perched on the elaborate *coiffure* of twists and coils, in which her fair hair was arranged. She certainly was very pretty, everyone acknowledged it. She was tall, being rather above the middle height, but, when you had said so much, that was about all that could be said for her figure—it was not actually a bad figure, but, most assuredly, it was not a good one; she had pretty hands, with long slender fingers, and her face was as fair as a blush-rose; her forehead was low and white, and her flaxen hair fell on either side in the rippling waves you may have seen in a Greek statue; her nose was slightly inclined to be aquiline, and her mouth, it must be owned, was the least prepossessing feature in her face—it was undeniably a foolish mouth, weak and without character, yet the lips were red as cherries and, when parted, displayed a row of even, pearly teeth, so beautiful in themselves that few persons noticed the weakness of the mouth. Her eyes were blue, not particularly large or expressive, but of a lovely turquoise tint, and her complexion was glorious—there was not

the least flaw in it, it was perfect: of the delicate whiteness of Parian marble, with an apple-blossom flush upon it—it was a complexion which would have made a plain face charming. Now Polly was most emphatically not plain!

She was a nice girl too—good-natured and gentle, and, though somewhat given to romancing and very much given to dreaming, had no bad habits. She played very nicely Thalberg's "Home, Sweet Home!" and other pieces of that calibre; she kept the flower-vases in the drawing room carefully arranged, and she spent a good deal of her time in the garden—the "grounds" the Antrobus family called them—sitting in a careless, yet graceful attitude, on some rustic bench, with a book in her hand, of which she read but little. Polly never did a stitch of sewing, but for the most part dreaming of that grand future which was coming, and trying how near she could model her person and her manners to those of a young duchess.

"A young duchess" was Polly's favourite ideal, though she had never seen one herself, and Lady Edith O'Shaughnassy's description of the young Duchess of Ballycorum was not at all the same class of person as Polly's Duchess of Dreamland.

"Just a slip of a girl, with a wide mouth and two great staring black eyes," Lady Edith had

said, "and dressed nine days out of ten in a gown of rough homespun and a thick grey jacket, with no end of pockets, and her boots—just regular brogues."

"And for church?" Polly had asked.

"Oh, not much better. A brown velveteen dress, with a jacket like it, and a brown felt hat, with a scarlet wing in it—sometimes a sealskin jacket, but not often, for Ballycorum is three miles from the church, and the duke's a big man, so she's warm enough walking."

"And does a duchess walk three miles to church?" Polly gasped, all her most cherished ideas thus being turned topsy-turvy.

"Of course—no one has his horses out on Sunday in our part," Lady Edith answered, promptly; "but when old Lady Ballycorum is at the Castle she uses the pony carriage."

It was very evident that her grace of Ballycorum did not belong to the same order as the Duchess of Dreamland—perhaps it was because she was an Irish duchess! Polly's "grace" lived in an atmosphere always heavy with perfumery, surrounded always by masses of hot-house flowers and rare exotics. Upon every occasion she made a *toilette*, and even her *négligées* were of the richest silk and velvet, profusely decked with *priceless* old lace;

with *her*, diamonds were so much a matter of course that even her bedroom slippers were adorned with buckles glittering with those costly gems—only the Duchess of Dreamland had nothing so common as a bedroom, she had a sleeping apartment; she summoned her footman by means of a silver bell, and when she felt “a little low”—which she did sometimes, in an exceedingly refined manner—drank rare wine out of a fragile goblet of Venetian glass; she was quite too luxurious to walk a step, and apparently did not stand in need of exercise like less privileged mortals.

As for the duke, he was but a lay figure. Once Polly had exerted herself sufficiently to begin a novel, with herself in the character of a duchess for heroine, but she came to one sentence so thrilling that she straightway fell a-dreaming, and the novel was never finished—

“May laid her hand on the embroidered sleeve of the duke”—— after that it was impossible to go on.

Well, the glorious summer months passed over, and the family at the River House seemed no nearer to attaining their object. Their intimacy with the barracks did not altogether progress—Mr. Antrobus called on the mess and received a few days later a couple of cards, left by two gentlemen,

who did not even ask if he was at home? Mrs. Hugh called on all the officers' wives—for the Cuirassiers had been ordered to Blankhampton a month after the Antrobuses went to the River House—but the calls had been returned and their invitations declined: the Cuirassiers would not have them at any price. However, they did manage to scrape a tolerable intimacy with the pay-master, whose back windows overlooked the River House gardens; and when, in due time, the invitations for the officers' ball were issued, through Captain Lewis's interest one went to the River House.

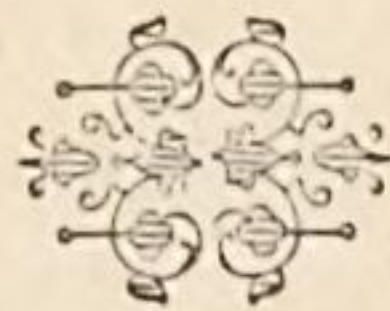
Polly was almost roused out of her habitual serenity. As for Mrs. Hugh, she folded her fat arms and beamed about the house with benignant triumph.

“You must have a new dress, Polly,” she cried.

“Oh yes,” Polly returned—that was a matter of course.

“Have you thought of anything nice?”

“Yes,” answered Polly, after a moment's pause; “I will have azure and silver.”



CHAPTER II.

“There was a sound of revelry by night.”

So there was: the Blankhampton Assembly Rooms were brilliantly lighted and superbly decorated. At the entrance stood two sergeants, each bearing a silver salver, one to receive the cards of invitation, one to dispense the programmes. Between them and the outer entrance stood a guard of honour, and within the room itself was stationed the regimental sergeant-major, ready to bawl forth the name of each fresh arrival.

On the right of the doorway, some yards within the room, stood Colonel Cotherstone, and opposite to him his officers *en masse*—only they were not exactly *en masse*, for they stood in a straight row, for the most part with their hands behind them, looking for all the world like a class of very gorgeous schoolboys just about to say their lessons. And so, after all, they were. My simile is not far wrong, for were they not one and all about to repeat the lesson which officers seem to be so proficient in learning, and which they are all so willing to teach to others?

“I wonder,” muttered Anthony Creyke to his next neighbour, Eliot Cardella, “if old Dare expects I

shall dance with his daughters, because if he does—" he broke off suddenly, for into the Honourable Eliot's grey eyes had come a gleam of surprise, and he exclaimed, "Gad! what a pretty girl!"

It was Polly—and Eliot Cardella was the Earl of Mallinbro's second son!

Major Creyke looked after Polly and remarked, "Pretty well." He did not admire pink and white Dresden-china sort of girls.

Eliot Cardella dropped out of the line at once and marched off to where Mrs. and Miss Antrobus were standing with Captain and Mrs. Lewis.

"Good evening, Mrs. Lewis. May I ask for the first?"

Under any other circumstances Mr. Cardella would have seen Mrs. Lewis on the top of the guard-room clock before he would have asked her to dance, but to all general rules there are exceptions, Polly made one that night.

"I believe the second is a galop?" he said to Polly, with that deferential air of courtesy which implies so much and really means so little.

"I believe it is," returned Polly, glancing at her card.

"I'm afraid I don't dance very well, excepting a polka," he began; "but if you will do me the honour ——"

“I shall be pleased,” said Polly, serenely.

“May I take a polka also?” he asked.

“Oh, yes,” Polly answered—she would have danced an Irish jig with Lord Mallinbro’s son.

And so the ball began ; Cardella walked through the mazes of a quadrille with Mrs. Lewis, and Mrs. Antrobus sat blandly watching her daughter do the same with Captain Lewis. She thought she had never seen Polly looking so well. Her dress of sheeny, shimmering blue silken stuff was wreathed with frosted silver gauze, and studded here and there with large frosted water-lilies ; round her white throat she wore a string of pearls, and half-hidden in her flaxen hair were half-opened water-lily-buds.

“Who’s Cardella talking to?” one Cuirassier asked of another ; “very pretty girl.”

“Ya-as,” returned the other, with the instinctive hauteur a soldier invariably puts on when speaking of some one a shade beneath him ; “fathaw’s a lawyer fellah !—always hanging about the barracks. Keep clear of attorneys myself, one never can be sure they havn’t a writ or two in their pockets—combining business and pleasaw at the same time, you know. Cardella seems taken.”

“Young fool,” said the first speaker, emphatically.

Meantime the band had struck up, and our couple

started ; but, after two turns, Eliot Cardella abruptly stopped.

“I must apologize for bringing you into this mess,” he said, in a tone of concern.

“It is of no consequence,” said Polly, sweetly, regardless of the strip of torn silk floating behind her, and the big frosted water-lily tossed to and fro amongst the dancers like a cork on a stormy sea. She was unaware that her substantial foot had come down like a half brick on that of her partner, and he gallantly kept the knowledge to himself.

“I won’t put you into further risk,” he said, politely. “Shall I find you another partner, or will you forgive me and sit this dance out?”

“I do not think there is anything to forgive,” said Polly, in a soft murmuring voice, and raising her turquoise blue eyes artlessly to his ; “I would just as soon sit out with you as dance with anyone else,” but there was the faintest emphasis on the word *you*, as if she preferred sitting out.

“You are too flattering,” returned the incorrigible flirt, sinking his voice to the level of her’s, and bending his eyes tenderly on her face. “Shall we find a seat here?”

“Here ” was a small lounge, almost hidden behind a folding-door and a screen of flowers, and just the very place Polly felt was best for a *tête-à-tête* with an

earl's son. She sank down in a languid attitude, her azure and silver draperies falling in graceful folds about her.

"I am so sorry," said Cardella, when he had squeezed himself into the small space left for him, "to have spoilt your beautiful dress! What a bore you must think me."

"I do not think it was you who did it," Polly answered, innocently; "I believe it was Colonel Cotherstone."

"Very likely."

In his heart he did not in the least care who had done it, and thought the colonel much more likely to be the delinquent than himself. When a man gets to the chief's age he ought to give up capering in a ball-room.

"I say, Cardella," said Dickson, ten minutes later, "look out what you're after, that girl's father is a lawyer—not of too high repute either. I don't deny that she's awfully pretty—only be careful."

"Oh! she's awfully pretty," Cardella said, readily, "but have you seen her feet? By George! they are heavy! The major's mare, Bonny Bell, trod on my foot last week, and it was nothing to hers," glancing in Polly's direction.

"Same foot?"

"Yes, worse luck."

“Poor devil,” laughed Dickson.

Who, having overheard the above conversation, would have expected to see Mr. Eliot Cardella make his way to Polly’s side as soon as she was free? And yet that was what he did. Probably the mere fact that there was a sharp father in the background only made him more ready for the fun of flirting with her. Everyone knows that an Englishman enjoys sport the better when it has an element of danger in it.

“Mr. Cardella,” said Polly, in her soft voice, “who is that strange-looking officer over there?”

“The elderly man?”

“Yes.”

“Oh! that’s our surgeon-major—‘Chronohotontologos,’ we call him.”

Polly opened her blue eyes very wide indeed.

“What do you say?” she gasped, at last.

“His real name is Williamson,” Cardella laughed, “but we call him ‘Chronohotontologos.’”

“It is most—extraordinary!” ejaculated Polly.

Chrono——why her mouth would be out of shape for ever if she contrived to pronounce half of it.

“Why do you call Dr. Williamson strange?” he asked, presently; “I assure you he is one of the very cleverest men you ever knew. Let me introduce him to you; you’ll be charmed with him.”

"No thank you," returned Polly, icily, "I would rather not."

"But why?"

"I do not take much interest in—doctors," she said, calmly.

It was all Cardella could do to avoid expressing his amazement by a long whistle. Fancy this lawyer's daughter turning up her nose at a man like Williamson, particularly when she had gone to that very ball under the auspices of Lewis, whose father had been master tailor of the 17th Hussars, and who himself had risen from the ranks.

"Must be a complete fool," thought Cardella, with an intense desire to burst out laughing. But when he took Polly back to her mother's side, and a partner immediately claimed her, something in Mrs. Hugh's fat bland face made him seat himself beside her. Dickson happening to pass just at that moment felt "the young fool" must have utterly taken leave of his senses.

"May I take you to have an ice, or a glass of wine?" he asked, courteously.

"Oh, no, thank you! I enjoy looking on."

"And so do I," he responded. "I suppose I ought to be hard at work introducing people, and so on, but I really hardly know a soul here, and I looked after most of the decorations."

“ You look tired,” said Mrs. Hugh, blandly.

“ I am a little tired,” he admitted.

“ Ah ! those tiresome field-days !” she responded, sympathetically ; “ I am sure they must be trying. I really do not know how you sacrifice yourselves so cheerfully, there must be so much restriction and general unpleasantness.”

“ Well, it isn’t so bad as Oxford,” he laughed.

“ Oh ! are you an *Ox*-ford man ?”

“ Yes,” wondering what she could find so astonishing in that.

“ My brother,” said Mrs. Hugh, with the air of a person playing the last trump, “ is the Dean of Brazenface.”

“ Brazenface,” Cardella repeated ; “ what is his name ?”

“ Fullerton,” said Mrs Hugh, more blandly than before.

“ Not Billy ?” the young man cried, forgetting his manners and suddenly recalling the dean.

“ Ye-es,” her tone was a trifle less oily.

“ Oh, I remember Billy well enough ”—utterly forgetting that it was her brother of whom they were speaking ; “ yes, I knew Billy and Billy knew me. Little fat man, with a squint.” The expression on her face made him, all at once, remember how completely he had set his foot in it ; and, to cover his

own embarrassment and her discomfiture, he began to speak volubly. "And so he is your brother, Mrs. Antrobus? Why, what a little world it is after all! I daresay you and I have lots of mutual friends, if we could only compare lists."

Mrs. Hugh's fat countenance literally shone with delight. He thought, in a good-natured way, that she really was a very jolly old lady, and was evidently not prone to take offence; for he had certainly been extremely rude, and ninety-nine ladies out of a hundred would have never taken any notice of him again, but this one seemed to enjoy the joke as much as he did.

Now, if Eliot Cardella had been in the Palace of Truth instead of the Blankhampton Assembly Rooms he would have learned one or two things which would have surprised him not a little. First, that Mrs. Hugh Antrobus did not consider herself at all *old*; and also, that her beaming did not arise from the joke concerning Dean Billy, but from his having so completely put himself upon a level with her: it was a new sensation for her to be thus chatting amicably with an earl's son, and, like the young gentleman in *Locksley Hall*, she

Looked into the future as far as eye could see.

In fact, she looked rather further, for she saw Polly, Polly no longer, but the Countess of Mal-

lingbro'—she disposed of Viscount Cardella without any ceremony—a coronet on her fair brow and costly diamonds flashing upon her fair throat and rounded arms. Seeing all that, she might well beam.

“*Good-night, Mr. Cardellah,*” she said, when he saw them into their cab, an hour or two later, “we shall be charmed if you will call.”

That cab was a great trial to Polly, but with a little make-believe, it was easy to fancy it had C-springs and brocaded cushions; but still, she was not sure that to Mr. Cardella it might make a difference.

CHAPTER III.

It was the day after the ball. Major Creyke and ten or twelve officers, chiefly juniors, were at luncheon, and there was one guest, the chaplain.

“I say, Mr. Brandon,” said the major to the guest, “did you happen to hear the riddle the colonel asked the Dean last night?”

“No; what was it?”

“Why are two young ladies, kissing each other, performing an act of the highest Christian virtue?”

“Give it up,” said the chaplain, at once.

“It was quite ecclesiastical.”

“Give it up,” he repeated.

“Because they are doing unto others as they would that men should do unto them—*men*, you know.”

“Oh ! the point isn’t exactly obscure,” laughed the chaplain ; “what did the Dean say ?”

“He bolted.”

“I should think so.”

At that moment a discussion arose at the other end of the table, almost amounting to a squabble, in the midst of which one of the youngest officers rapped out an ugly word. The major rose at once and rang the bell.

“Mr. Brandon, will you take cherry brandy ?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“So will I. You,” looking at the others’ present, “will have what you like ; and,” turning to the servant, “put it down to Mr. Cogner, for using bad language in Mr. Brandon’s presence.”

For a moment the subaltern looked a little dismayed, but since there was no remedy for the major’s fiat but cheerful acquiescence and an avoidance of evil speaking for the future, he was obliged to get over his chagrin as best he could.

“By-the-bye, Brandon,” remarked the major, presently, “do you know anything of a man called Antrobus—you’ve been here longer than we have?”

“Lawyer?” the chaplain asked.

“Yes!—lives at a big house near the river, and has a pretty daughter.”

“No, I don’t know them personally—they had not been there very long when you came; Captain Kennedy had that house before them.”

“And you don’t know anything about him?”

“No, I can’t say I do, except that he does a good deal in the money-lending way. Why do you ask?”

“Because they contrived to get to the ball last night—through Lewis, I suppose; if I’d known anything about him, I’d have struck his name off the list.”

“He’s coming down the square now,” put in Dickson, suddenly. “I’m off!”

“So am I,” cried the major. “Come up to my rooms, Brandon, and have a cigar.”

In consequence of this, when Mr. Antrobus arrived at the ante-room it was tenantless, and, having left the regulation amount of paste-boards, he was obliged to go away, as wise as he went. Even Eliot Cardella cleared out with the rest. It was all very well, he argued, to amuse himself for an hour or two with a pretty girl, but to entertain the old money-lending father, when all the other fellows had cleared out at his

approach, was rather more than he felt inclined to do. Moreover, he had half-promised the old woman to call, and, if he saw Mr. Antrobus then, he could hardly do that. Not that he had quite decided to call—he did not know, he was sure, whether it would be exactly wise—it would be almost like putting his head into the lion's mouth; and yet, she was awfully pretty, there was no denying that.

He went up to his room in a very undecided frame of mind. He wanted to go and see Polly—what he did not want, was the objectionable father and mother. He wondered, impatiently, why nice girls need have objectionable belongings, how much nicer it would be to “shunt” them, as they do in the States.

He drew a chair to the fire and smoked a pipe, then he changed his clothes, and sat down again in a greater state of indecision than before. They say that a certain road is paved with good intentions. Now Eliot Cardella's intentions were undeniably good—in fact, they were rather better (in a worldly sense) than good, for they were cautious; and yet—yet he hesitated a little longer, and finally succumbed to the voice of the tempter, and betook himself to call at the River House. Polly was very pretty, and

Eliot Cardella was particularly susceptible to feminine charms—as a consequence, four o'clock found him chatting pleasantly in the drawing-room at the River House with Mrs. Antrobus and Polly.

That visit was quickly followed by an invitation to dinner, which occasioned a little more hesitation on Cardella's part, and ended by being accepted.

Oh, that dinner party! It lay like a leaden weight on Mrs. Hugh's mind for a week; she could not get rid of it, night or day—it was like a lump of indigestible pudding, and much worse than a bad conscience. Polly never worried herself about anything; she superintended the decorations of the table and put fresh flowers in the vases—then she dressed herself carefully and went down, in good time, looking very graceful in a gown of pearly-grey silk, finished at the throat and wrists with some antique rose-point, which Mrs. Hugh *said* had been her grandmother's. At her throat she had a bunch of large sweet-smelling purple violets, secured by a tiny brooch of seed pearls in the form of a leaf, and in her hair she had several clusters of the same fragrant blossoms. Polly certainly had some very good points, she was never impatient, and if she tried rather too much to model herself after Tenny-

son's heroine, who seemed to her to be very *haut ton*—"Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, dead perfection"—why she never condescended to anything so vulgar as quarrelling, and upon all occasions she was very pleasant to look upon. Some people may think that a very small virtue, for which Polly deserved no praise, but *men* will all agree with me, that it is a very great matter indeed.

As usual, Mrs. Hugh was late, and only scurried into the room as the first vehicle rolled up to the door. Polly, who had been gazing reflectively into the fire, turned, as Cardella's voice fell upon her ear, with a pretty pleased smile of welcome and—well, for once, she was vexed, for there stood Mrs. Hugh, with her dress well tucked up about her, displaying a not too clean white petticoat, the long folds of silk gathered up under her arms, just for all the world as it was when she went into the kitchen in the morning to look after the *cuisine*. Polly could have shaken her; but, since that was impracticable, she interposed her own slight person and flowing draperies as much as she could between the Honourable Eliot and the vast bulk, which she called "mother," and at the very first opportunity gave the dress a vigorous tug.

“Do let your dress down, mamma,” she said, in a sharp whisper.

“Dear me! how absent-minded I am,” remarked Mrs. Hugh, blandly. “I don’t know what I should do, Polly, if I had not you to look after me.”

Which, for Polly, was out of Scylla into Charybdis. She needn’t have troubled herself: Cardella was not sufficiently interested in Mrs. Hugh to notice her; he only saw Polly, and thought she was looking prettier than usual, with that sudden deepening of the apple-blossom flush on her cheeks, and that shy uplifting of her blue eyes. And oh! by Jove! what a jolly gown she had got on. That jolly silvery grey, with such lace as his mother often wore, and those velvety, sweet-smelling violets, fastened by the little pearl brooch. He did not know much about dress, but he thought she looked very distinguished and quiet.

“I was so disappointed not to meet you at the Deanery last night,” he remarked, somewhat awkwardly for Polly, who had never been asked to the Deanery in her life, but fortunately he did not give her time to reply. “Such a lot of hideous women there were too,” he said, resentfully, as if they had all been asked for his especial annoyance.

“Perhaps you are very bad to please,” she said, softly.

“Oh! I know a pretty woman when I see one,” he returned, coolly. “What lovely violets you have; I smelt them the moment I entered the room.”

“The children got them for me,” Polly said, deprecatingly. “We generally have plenty in the hot-house.”

“I wish they would give me some,” he returned.

“You shall have some of these,” unfastening her brooch as she spoke.

“I will keep them for ever,” he said, in a low voice.

“Or throw them out of the cab window,” she laughed, “like the gentleman in ‘Sweethearts.’”

“I thought he threw them overboard,” Cardella murmured, lazily leaning against the chimney-shelf, and regarding Polly with the well-satisfied air with which all men regard a pretty woman, leaving the tender passion quite out of the question.

“Oh yes, of course; he threw them overboard after all the protestations he made, but she—kept hers.”

“Never make protestations myself,” he remarked; “awfully bad plan.”

“I thought you said you would keep those violets for ever,” said Polly, raising her blue eyes for an instant.

“By Jove! what pretty eyes,” thought Cardella; then, aloud, “So I shall.”

“ Oh, nonsense !” the girl laughed, twisting one or two of the flowers in her slender fingers.

“ Don’t you believe me ?” throwing a little extra warmth into his tone, that he might make her look up again. A moment later he wished he had not succeeded ; the full glance of her eyes had disappointed him. They were pretty in colouring, but there was no soul looking through those blue windows ; the face was nearly perfect, for the only approach to a fault lay in the mouth, and he noticed nothing beyond the red ripe lips and the even pearly teeth, but it was quite expressionless : there was no fun playing about the mouth, there was no awakening of that fierce fire which lived in his susceptible heart ; it was an artistic mask—“ icily regular, splendidly null, dead perfection.”

“ Do you never keep your *souvenirs* ?” he asked.

“ *I* ? Oh, no !”

For the first time a gleam of expression came into her face and eyes—a half-quizzical, half-dismayed look, which made him forget his disappointment, and think how awfully pretty she was. If her sense of humour was somewhat latent it was there, and Cardella was just in the frame of mind to enjoy calling up an unusual trait in her character, more than if she had been clever enough to see and appreciate every little joke that cropped up.

She contrived—quite accidentally, of course—to pilot her “gentleman” to the seat next to Eliot, who had taken in Mrs. Hugh, and presently, under cover of the general chatter and Mrs. Hugh’s benignant attention to her right-hand neighbour, contrived to inform Polly that he thought her name remarkably pretty.

“Mary?” she said, enquiringly.

“No, Polly! There is something very soft and sweet-sounding about it, and really, in these fine days, anything homely and old-fashioned is pretty.”

“It has the advantage of being both,” Polly said, with a laugh.

“It has. Now my mother is called Gladys Elizabeth Tudor, but my father always calls her ‘Nancy.’”

“I like that,” remarked Polly, with great decision. It was true. If the Countess of Mallinbro’ was called “Nancy,” it would create no surprise if her daughter-in-law was named “Polly.” All the same, she made up her mind that, if she ever came to be the Honourable Mrs. Eliot Cardella, she would spare no pains to have the name of Polly put aside in favour of May.

Practically, Polly finished the Honourable Eliot off that night, for after dinner she sang—it was only a simple ballad she chose, and her voice

was not a fine one, though she sang expressively. He had heard the song scores of times : the great Canadian singer : at amateur concerts ; in drawing-rooms such as this ; ground out from barrel-organs, and yet there he was listening to it again, with all his soul in his eyes and a strange yearning and fluttering at his heart, such as Polly's dead perfection by itself could never have had power to bring there.

What made the assembly shine ?

Robin Adair !

What made the ball so fine ?

Robin was there !

What, when the play was o'er,

What made my heart so sore,

Oh ! it was parting with—

Robin Adair.

Music had always been a passion with him : that dear quaint old ballad conquered him—the earl's son, and Polly was the daughter of a not too reputable attorney. What an odd world it is !

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW weeks had passed ! Two men were talking in Captain Dickson's room—at least, Eliot Car-della was talking and Dickson lounging in a chair, with a pipe in his mouth and clothed in very much-be-splashed cords and pink, was listening attentively.

“And so you’ve regularly got let in,” he remarked between the puffs at his pipe, when Cardella had finished what he was saying; “and what are you going to do?”

“Dashed if I know,” he said, ruefully.

“What’ll your father say?”

“Say—he’ll tell me to go to the devil, as sure as fate. You see, Dickson, blood is his hobby. He wouldn’t care if Cardella and I married girls without a farthing, so long as their pedigrees were all right, but——”

“The daughter of a money-lending country attorney, with rather a shady reputation into the bargain,” suggested Dickson, “will hardly be likely to meet with a warm welcome, eh?”

“Just drive him frantic,” returned Eliot, promptly.

“’Pon my soul, you are an ass,” Dickson laughed, with delightful frankness; “because, you know, I warned you from the beginning what it would lead to.”

“So you did; but then I never dreamt of its coming to this.”

“But they did. I should exchange into a regiment in India and cut the whole concern, if I were you.”

“Oh! I couldn’t very well do that,” Cardella returned, doubtfully, “what would she think?”

“Oh! well if you want to marry her—” Dickson began.

“Why, I like Polly well enough,” he said, hesitatingly, “and, if it was not for the governor, I’d marry her at once and cut the lot, though I’m not exactly——”

“In love with her?” Dickson suggested.

“Yes, just so.”

“Well, my dear chap, I don’t see how I can help you—I’d go in and make violent love to her myself, if I thought she would throw you over for me, but I am sure she would not.”

“You are a much richer man than I am.”

“But you’ve got a handle to your name,” rejoined the other. “No, really, I don’t see what you are to do but go on with it, or get out of the country and cut the whole concern.”

“Cardella’s coming to-morrow, for a fortnight’s hunting,” said Eliot, dismally.

There really seemed to be no loop-hole for escape. The more Eliot Cardella pondered over the fix into which he had got himself, the worse did his situation appear. He had gone through the whole family programme: Mrs. Hugh had attempted—ineffectually, it is true—to embrace him; her husband had wrung his hand and pretended to dash away a few tears at the same

time; the two younger sisters at once began to call him Eliot with, what seemed to him, unnecessary distinctness and vain repetition; and the young cub of a brother, who was, he believed, "articled" to his father, had linked his arm in his future brother-in-law's and walked the whole length of the High Street with him—after which he had gone back to barracks in a towering rage and relieved his mind by making a confident of Dickson, who could see as far through a milestone as most men.

And the cream of the whole affair was that he was not in love with Polly a bit; he liked her well enough, and certainly admired her; but her belongings—they very nearly maddened him: what effect they would have upon his father he was afraid to think—the courtly old earl who had married the dark-eyed, olive-skinned daughter of a duke, and who would see no charm in Polly's fresh, fair, apple-blossom loveliness. Why, he would not admire Venus herself if a drop of plebian blood ran in her veins. What would he think of Polly?

The following day Viscount Cardella arrived at Blankhampton, and established himself at the sign of the "Golden Swan." Between the brothers there was a striking likeness, but the viscount was larger,

fairer, handsomer than Eliot, and with even more of the old earl's courtly grace about him, and decidedly a greater capacity for flirting than his brother.

As soon as he had asked after home, Eliot plunged head foremost into the subject just then uppermost in his thoughts.

"I'm going to get married, Cardella," he announced, abruptly.

"Going to get married, are you?" returned the viscount, whom for the future we shall call Cardella; "what a fool you must be," with great cheerfulness. "Is she good looking?"

"Very." Eliot wished everything was as satisfactory as Polly's looks.

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Antrobus."

"Antrobus—never met her. Got any money? Who's her father?"

"I don't think she'll have much money," Eliot said, dubiously, "and her father's a lawyer."

"A *lawyer*!" Cardella exclaimed, all the cheerful interest vanishing from face and voice. "You mean a barrister?"

"I mean a lawyer," returned Eliot, firmly.

"Good life!—what will the earl say?"

"I daresay he will cut me," Eliot answered, with

a nervous laugh, which he tried vainly to make defiant.

“And you’ve fallen in love?”

“No, I havn’t. I like her very well, but—oh! damn it all, Cardella, I’ve got let in, so I must take the consequences. I always was the fool of the family.”

Cardella said nothing, but sat looking into the fire, with a grave face.

“There’ll be all the more money for you if the governor cuts me off,” Eliot said, bitterly.

“Don’t suggest anything so horrid, my dear old chap; there will be enough for both of us,” Cardella answered, soothingly. “I was only thinking, if you really don’t care for this girl, it seems a pity to spoil your whole life. I’ll tell you what, you must take me to see her. Can you take me to dinner to-night?”

“They told me to take you—like their cheek!” he cried, angrily.

“Then send a note up at once. I shall know better what to do when I’ve seen them.”

The result of this was, that Lord Cardella and the Honourable Eliot went that evening to dine *en famille* at the River House. Eliot thought his brother had taken leave of his senses, for the moment he beheld Polly he, metaphorically speaking,

fell down and worshipped her, which, with the utter unreasonableness of human nature, he highly resented. Hang it all, but it was too bad of Cardella to go poaching on his manor like that. Of course, if he chose to marry Polly, the earl's pleasure or displeasure would make but small difference to him, since the personal property was nothing in comparison with the entailed estates. Therefore, when Cardella went back to his hotel, Eliot turned in the direction of the barracks with a sulky "good-night," at which the viscount laughed out aloud.

It happened that the next afternoon, when returning from hunting, he fell in with Dickson, and, after a little desultory chat, suddenly remarked :

"By the way, Dickson, can you tell me anything about these people my young brother's got mixed up with?"—Eliot was five-and-twenty.

"I don't know them myself," Dickson replied, "but I understand the father's a third-rate attorney, who does a good deal in the money-lending line."

"Ah!" murmured the viscount, comprehensively.

But Captain Dickson's information made no difference whatever in his manner towards the family at the River House. He told Mrs. Hugh that Polly was a perfect aristocrat, at which Mrs. Hugh beamed so intensely that the viscount caught himself won-

dering what he should do if any part of her skin gave way.

He assailed Polly on her weakest points. He from the first refused to call her Polly, as a name utterly unsuited to her delicate style of beauty: he invariably called her *May*! He monopolised her altogether. Eliot looked sulkily on, whilst Cardella sauntered about the town with his *fiancée*, or hung over her at the piano. His horses stood idle in their stables, for though he had gone to Blankhampton for the express purpose of hunting, he spent all his mornings in the drawing-room at the River House, *tête-à-tête* with Polly, and invariably to the intense astonishment and surprise of Mrs. Hugh, when he made his appearance in the dining-room, and begged, with the courtly grace which had broken a score or so of hearts, for luncheon.

Polly's manner to Eliot grew colder and colder. He was all very well, she argued, but *only* a second son after all. Lord Cardella was more her style; the way he made love—and he made very desperate love indeed—was so different to Eliot, who had seized hold of her, and almost crushed her to death. Lord Cardella was accustomed to lift her hand to his lips in a manner Polly thought most entrancing.

Of course, to be the Honourable Mrs. Eliot Cardella, would be an enviable position, but the

Countess of Mallinbro'—ah! that was her true sphere!

And so the days crept on, lengthening as they passed, and Cardella still lingered at Blankhampton. The breach between the brothers grew wider and wider, and bets began to pass freely among the Cuirassiers as to which would come off the victor. They all thought them both a couple of fools for their pains, but, of course, they knew their own business best.

Cardella's devotion to Polly grew more and more tender, Eliot's face sulkier, and his temper more uncertain, until, at length, Mr. Antrobus took him into the library and asked if it was true that his income depended entirely on his father's caprice?

"Quite true," Eliot returned, "except for ten thousand under my mother's settlement."

"Then I think it will be best for the engagement between you and my daughter to come to an end," he said, gravely. "I am not a rich man, and I have three other children to provide for. It had best end."

"I decline to give her up," Eliot answered, hotly, "excepting she writes and tells me she does not care for me."

"I think she will do so," said Mr. Antrobus, quietly; "I believe I am doing what is best for the happiness of you both."

When Eliot got back to barracks, he found his brother in the ante-room, having, for a wonder, gone to lunch there, instead of to the River House. During the meal a note was brought in, addressed in Polly's well-known caligraphy :

The Hon. Eliot Cardella,
Cuirassiers.

Eliot knew its purport before he opened it. It ran :

MY DEAR ELIOT,—

I think my father's decision is for the best, but I hope we shall remain all our lives sincere friends.

Believe me, always truly yours,

MARY ANTROBUS.

That was the end of it. He put the note in his pocket, and asked Cardella presently to go up to his room—

“I've something to show you.”

Cardella, who had resolutely refused to acknowledge any cloud between his brother and himself, followed him, and Eliot put the note into his hands with a laugh and one word—“Superseded.”

“Look here, Eliot,” he said, when he had read it, “I have got you out of the most confounded scrape you ever were in in all your life. I shall go back to town this afternoon, and I hope you'll be as grateful as you ought to be, when you've got over this a

little," at which Eliot Cardella burst into a fit of hearty, uncontrollable laughter.

The sulks, like the devotion, had been put on, but though the brothers had been playing at cross-purposes, their plan had succeeded.

I will leave the reader to imagine how the family at the River House felt the next day, when Mrs. Hugh received a card :

VISCOUNT CARDELLA,
P. P. C.



THE LADY-KILLER-IN-CHIEF.

CHAPTER I.

“Most awfully shabby,” said Dorothy St. George, calmly; “but then, since I have not another, what am I to do? I am not a spider, therefore I cannot evolve a new gown out of my own inner consciousness.”

“Let me give you a gown—two gowns,” pleaded Jack Sinclair, flushing a little under the girl’s steady gaze, yet looking very handsome and soldierly in the brilliant June sunshine.

“My good Jack,” returned Miss St. George, quietly, “have you sufficient money to pay your debts?”

“No,” he admitted, unwillingly.

“Then how can you afford to buy me gowns? And how can you imagine for one moment that I should take them, if you could?”

“If you loved me——” he began.

“My good Jack,” said the girl again, gravely, lifting her azure eyes leisurely to his, “it seems to me you are a great deal too well assured of the state of my feelings. Some people, you know, have

a habit of counting their chickens before they are hatched."

"Oh, Dolly, you do love me!" he cried.

"Perhaps, just a little," half indifferently; "certainly not enough to let you buy me—*clothes!*" with a sudden shamed flush at the bare idea of it.

Jack Sinclair sighed impatiently. He had no such pride himself; but then, to be sure, no cavalry officers ever have, except they are rank men. He, that very morning, had shaved himself in Broughton's room, because Broughton had just had his razors ground; he had passed on to the next room to sponge the remains of the lather off his face, because Broughton was using his sponge and basin for a like purpose; he had borrowed a collar-stud on his way back to his own quarters, because his laundress had sent his shirt home minus a button at the throat; and before he finished dressing he had lent his last clean cotton tie to Dickson, who had got two days' leave; he had surrendered his hair brushes to Squints, who had walked in for no apparent reason—perhaps because some one was using his—and had helped Ponto out of a difficulty by the loan of a shell jacket. Thus Jack Sinclair, accustomed to regard his belongings and those of his brother officers as public property, could not understand why the suggestion that he should buy his

fiancée a gown—which, goodness knows, she stood sorely in need of—need bring that shamed flush to her proud face.

“Then how will you do?” he asked at length, rather ruefully.

“Stay at home,” she laughed; then sang, in a rich mellow voice,

“Stay, stay at home, my heart, and rest,
Home-keeping hearts are happiest!”

“Oh, I daresay!” Jack put in, very ruefully in deed. But the girl only laughed and sang on:

“For those that wander, they know not where,
Are full of trouble and full of care:
To stay at home is best.”

“But, Dolly, my darling,” he interrupted, “couldn’t Mrs. St. George lend you a dress?”

“Mrs. St. George,” answered Dorothy, regarding him gravely, yet with laughter in her brilliant eyes, “is possessed of *one* presentable gown besides the one you see her in every day.”

“I’m sure she would lend it to you,” cried Jack.

“It is a *moiré antique*,” said Dorothy, as if there need be nothing more said upon the subject.

“Well, what of that? I remember, the last time I was at home, my mother was wearing one, a bright green one it was, with white-pot buttons—she said they were porcelain, but I knew better.”

“ Ah ! ” remarked Dorothy, without much interest.

“ Then you’ll come to the sports to-morrow, darling ? ”

“ *The moiré*, ” returned Dorothy, “ is of the most startling rose-colour you ever saw. Why, Jack, all the women would be laughing at us. ”

“ Let them, ” he rejoined, fiercely ; “ who cares ? ”

“ I do, for one. No, Jack : some day, when we are rich, I will go to the sports ; and I’ll give a cup, and you shall run for it. ”

“ I don’t see why you can’t come in the gown you’ve got on, ” he grumbled, “ it looks awfully jolly ; ” but, all the same, he was very well aware that the garment in question was very, very shabby ; it was so entirely out of keeping with its wearer. Jack thought, as he watched her that lovely June day, that he had never seen a more perfect picture than she made as she sat upon the river’s bank, the willows and the turf making a background against which her radiant loveliness shone out more like a gem in a dark setting than anything else he could think of. She had taken off her hat, and the sunshine streamed down upon her golden head, giving the heavy braids the appearance of a diadem. Jack wished passionately that he could have given her a crown of rubies and diamonds ; and yet he knew that no gold would ever become her as did

those imperial coils of lustrous hair, no sapphires could ever equal the beauty of her azure eyes.

And yet she was so very, very shabby ; her brown stuff gown was positively threadbare—"bright as a sixpence," she said. One little foot was visible beneath the frill of her gown, and an inch or two of a slender ankle : they, the foot and the ankle, were all right, Jack had admired them dozens of times ; but the boot which covered the foot, oh, it made him absolutely shiver !—seven-and-sixpence a pair, with square toes that seemed to be of an inquiring turn ! Ugh ! Jack looked from them to his own patent leather and canvass boots at thirty-five shillings a pair, and thought of the dozen or two of others which stood all in a neat row in the lowest compartment of his cupboard, and he had the grace to feel ashamed of himself. If Dorothy St. George could case her little slender feet in such boots as those and keep out of debt, why need he, a great hulking brute, with feet like potatoes, have a boot-maker's bill as long as his arm ?

He looked, too, at her little hands folded idly before her, such pretty hands, with pink-tinted filbert nails ; then his eyes fell upon a certain mark along the forefinger of the one which lay uppermost, and, bending down, he kissed it as if he would fain kiss that disfiguring seam away. Oh, why should she

have to work so hard, whilst his sisters, not half so fair, dawdled their time away, and gave dresses to their maid such as Dorothy could never afford to buy? Oh, why should it be? A flush mounted to the young man's brow, and his eyes sank before the glory of hers: the question was easy to answer. He had "sown the wind" in a long course of reckless extravagance, in the raising of his father's just anger; now he was "reaping the whirlwind", in banishment from home, and in the pain of knowing that between Dorothy St. George and him lay a long array of debts which he had no money to pay.

And there are people who say our sins do not find us out in this world!

"Oh, my darling!" he cried, with a sudden burst of passion, "how I will make up to you for all this some day!"

"Some day," she repeated, wistfully; "if, by the time you come into your kingdom, you have not repented, Jack!"

"Repented! Why?"

"You will be rich, I still poor."

"Supposing I remained always poor and you became very rich, would you desert me, Dolly?"

"I cannot say, I am sure," she laughed. "I have always been so awfully poor, you see, that if I were

suddenly lifted up in the world I might tiptilt my nose even at you."

"Ah, you don't mean that," he said, coolly.

"There's many a true word spoken in jest," she quoted, gravely.

"Then, thank God, there is no chance of it!" he cried, vehemently.

"No, indeed," with a smile, half bitter, half sad. "Do you know, Jack, that I don't know who I am? I never shall know it."

"Yes, yes; you told me. Don't talk about it."

"But I must talk about it. I'll tell you now," she answered. "To begin at the beginning, I must tell you my mother's name was Meredith. At sixteen she was left to the care of her uncle, a clergyman in North Wales. Her father also had been a clergyman. She had not been many weeks at Llangwylt before she met my father, who was staying in the neighbourhood for the trout-fishing. He fell in love with her and married her; my great-uncle married them himself. After the marriage they went abroad; and one day it came out quite by chance that he had been married under a false name—George St. George. He assured her that the legality of the marriage was certain. He told her also that his reason for deceiving her was because his uncle, who had very large unentailed estates, had

arranged a marriage for him ; and if he heard anything of my mother, would probably cut him off with but a very small property. My mother never troubled herself about it ; she loved him, and she had perfect faith in him, and so a few months passed over. He seems, although quite young, being only seven-and-twenty at the time of the marriage, to have had a most passionate and unforgiving temper, as my mother found to her cost—and mine ; for one day she angered him so much that he left her. I fancy she had been in a passion herself, and had cried out that she no longer loved him. Whatever it was, he never forgot it or forgave it. ‘You shall never see me again,’ he told her ; ‘*and you shall never know who you are.*’ From that day to this she has never seen him. For anything we know to the contrary, he may have been a chimney sweeper. Mother went back to Llangwylt, and I was born there ; and when her uncle died six years ago we came here, to starve upon seventy pounds a year,” she broke off, bitterly.

“Did she never try to find him out?”

“Uncle Meredith wished to do so but mother was too proud.”

“What a strange story !” Jack said, thoughtfully ; “and, oh, by Jove ! what a beastly temper he must have had !”

“Ah! that’s where mine comes from,” rejoined Dorothy, calmly. “Who’s that, Jack?” as a boat passed them, a graceful outrigger, with a man in white flannels, who came as near to the bank as he could venture, evidently to stare at her, and who, after a salutation to Jack, sculled away, and was out of sight in no time.

“That, my darling, is the handsomest man in the service,” Jack answered. “We call him the Lady-Killer-in-Chief.”

CHAPTER II.

THE Lady-Killer-in-Chief had changed his flannels for his ordinary clothes—light grey trousers, and a coat of grey velveteen. He certainly, as he sauntered down the High Street at Blankhampton, merited the homage which was paid to his personal appearance when his brother officers spoke of him as the handsomest man in the service. The only fault in his face was its extreme coldness: cold classic features; cold blonde hair, irreproachably parted down the middle, and brushed straight away behind his ears without a hair being out of place; cold hazel eyes, large and beautiful in themselves; and a cold smile,

like the flickering of a feeble winter sun over snow-topped mountains. An utterly cold manner too—which to women seemed irresistible—and perhaps the most cutting caustic wit that had ever made itself felt in the mess-room of the Blankhampton Barracks. Swaggering leisurely down the High Street he met with Dickson, who, as a matter of course, stopped.

“Where have you been?”

“I’ve been for a pull. The river’s awfully jolly to-day, and, by-the-bye, Dickson”—plunging at once into the subject uppermost in his thoughts—“can you tell me who that girl is Sinclair goes about with—tall girl with golden hair?”

“I don’t know her name. I believe Sinclair’s going to marry her.”

“Going to marry her! Ah! is it settled?”

“I really don’t know. She’s a very handsome girl,” remarked Dickson, carelessly.

“Uncommonly,” Montagu replied, with what, for him, was great warmth. “And so Sinclair’s serious?”

“Oh, quite so!” adding with a laugh, “has she ‘taken’ you rather? No use; she’s awfully in love with Sinclair.”

“Pooh! I’ll cut him out in a week,” cried Montagu, confidently.

“I don’t believe she’ll look at you.”

“Won’t she? Well, you’ll see;” and then the

two men parted, and went their respective ways, neither of them in the least aware that the subject of their conversation was just within the door of the shop behind them, and had heard their whole conversation, with proud scorn filling her violet eyes, and utter contempt on her imperious mouth.

Bryan Montagu did not find the task he had set himself altogether easy to accomplish, for he could not succeed in making a start. In the first place he did not know who she was, nor where she lived; and since he never met her anywhere he could not obtain an introduction. However, at last, he happened to meet her with Sinclair in a shop, and asked boldly to be introduced.

Miss St. George was very gracious to him. She smiled so enchantingly that Jack straightway went off into a towering rage and scolded her all the way home, at which she laughed more heartily than he had ever heard her laugh in his life. To add to his wrath, Montagu informed him during dinner that evening that Miss St. George was really very decent-looking; "and I believe I passed you on the river one day last week," he ended.

"Yes, and you turned and stared at her as if she'd been some little milliner-girl," Jack returned, sulkily.

“The penalty of beauty, my dear chap,” laughed Montagu, lightly. “Now I assure you I’m so accustomed to be ogled that I should feel quite uncomfortable with people who didn’t admire me.”

“Miss St. George didn’t admire you, at all events,” retorted Jack, with a short laugh; “for she said she never saw such a ‘screw’ in her life.”

At which Bryan Montagu, who was really a very pretty oar, though, perhaps, with a slight tendency to “screw,” was, for once, taken aback; and registered an inward vow that before many days were over he would pay Miss St. George out with interest for that unflattering remark. And pay her out—how? As he had made many another girl suffer before—broken-hearted for the cold hazel eyes which for her had been wont to have no coldness in their clear depths; for the straight-featured classic face which had made itself her heaven; for the sound of the smooth persuasive voice which would fall upon her ears never more, or, if perchance it did so, fraught only with slighting indifference, more hard to bear than silence. That was the plan Mr. Bryan Montagu marked out as Miss St. George’s punishment.

Accordingly, the following afternoon, instead of betaking himself to the club, or his more favourite

river, he turned in the direction of the village in which Mrs. St. George's little house was; and, as luck would have it, just as he passed the Cotherstone's house he saw Miss St. George emerge from the gate of her cottage, and turn down the lane leading to the river. He followed instantly, and reached her just as she was about to pass through the little gate which opened into the River Fields.

Mr. Montagu lifted his hat with his most fascinating smile. Miss St. George blushed becomingly, and half drooped her splendid eyes. Mr. Montagu thought he had never before beheld so lovely a face. Miss St. George thought—well, she *looked* as if she found herself in Arcadia.

“You are going for a walk?” he asked.

“Well, no. I am going to sit by the edge of the river and read,” she replied.

“May I come with you and talk instead?” he asked, imploringly.

“Oh yes, if you like,” she replied, calmly, thinking what a lucky thing it was that Jack was safely out of the road, being on duty that day.

Any one who could have heard their conversation that afternoon must have laughed, even if it had been Jack Sinclair himself; they were so awfully polite, to begin with; each seemed to be

trying how fascinating he or she could be; each seemed so desperately anxious to make the other pleased. They got along like a house on fire, which is, as every one knows, a tolerably rapid rate. In fact, they got on so well that Mr. Montagu had already advanced as far as personal compliments ere Miss St. George found out she really *must* be going home, with an emphasis on the "must," by which she evidently intended to convey to him the fact that only stern necessity compelled her to move at all. But they got still further before they reached the gate of Mrs. St. George's cottage; for, after a little circumlocution, she promised to meet him at the same time and place the following afternoon. All the same, she raised but very little objection before she consented, and Mr. Montagu felt he had never come across a cherry so ripe and ready to fall into his mouth.

"Hollo, Sinclair!" he called out to Jack, whom he met in the square. "Down in the mouth, eh? Ah, it's an awful nuisance not being able to get out of the square, isn't it? Particularly when there's a nice young woman half-a-mile off waiting for you. And she *did* look so nice this afternoon."

The hot anger leapt into Jack Sinclair's grey

eyes, but his heart grew cold as lead within him, for he had never felt very sure of Dorothy; and if Montagu made up his mind to go in for her, he knew well enough that he would spare no pains to accomplish the desirable attainment or putting his (Jack's, that is) nose out of joint.

"How do you know?" he growled.

"Because she has been with me for the last three hours," Montagu returned, coolly.

"I don't believe it!" poor Jack thundered; but all the same he felt from the other's manner that it was true.

"Just as you like, of course, my dear chap," said Montagu, carelessly; "but go along the path leading through the River Fields to-morrow afternoon between three and four, and you will see for yourself."

Sinclair turned away without answering, for Montagu's quiet manner had left him without hope. Of course the following afternoon he went, and saw for himself that his comrade had spoken truly. There, just visible about the river's bank, was Dorothy's hatless golden head, and in suspicious nearness to it Montagu's sleek blonde *caput*; and whilst he stood there watching and half hidden by the hedge, her merry laugh rang out upon the still summer air in a peal which

re-echoed in Jack's heart like the death-knell of all his dearest hopes. Oh, he was reaping the whirlwind, and no mistake about it!

"Now, did you do as I advised?" Montagu asked him at mess that night, in a tone of sneering triumph. "Are you convinced?"

"Hang you!" cried poor Jack, passionately.

"By no means," returned Montagu, calmly, going on with his dinner as if that was the chief object of his existence. "You shouldn't allow yourself to fly into such transports of rage, my dear chap; it's not good form, to begin with; it's bad for the digestion—bad every way. You're a deuced good fellow, Sinclair; but you go into everything with such terrible earnestness. It spoils you, my dear fellow; and it will be getting you into trouble one of these days, take my word for it."

But during the weeks which followed Jack's rage had time enough to cool. As far as Dorothy was concerned, he had resigned in favour of Bryan Montagu, who had contrived to get the *entrée* to the house, and who pretty nearly lived there. Twice Dorothy had written to know why he kept away, and to ask him to come; and both times he had sent a formal reply, declining the invitation. He scarcely went outside the barracks, and when he did so, went between six and seven—a

time when he knew Dorothy was very unlikely to be out.

At last, however, he was one day compelled to go into the town early in the afternoon; and about half-way down the High Street he saw Dorothy and Montagu coming on the same side of the street. They were close upon him before he perceived them, but he did not hesitate a moment. He turned sharply to the right, and crossed over to the other side without so much as a look, and without any recognition whatever. Dorothy turned very white, but she kept a brave front to the world, and laughed it off as usual. Montagu tackled Jack upon the subject that evening.

“Now, I tell you what it is, Sinclair,” he said, leaning back in his chair, and surveying Jack with much amusement in his eyes, “your behaviour is what *I* call uncommonly shabby. Blow-hot, blow-cold, you know.”

“Mind your own business,” returned Jack, sulkily.

“Ah, conscience touching you up a bit, eh? Well, it’s what you must expect, whilst you behave as you’ve done lately. Oh, Sinclair, you’ve a great deal to answer for! you’ve brought desolation into a once happy home, grief to a once happy heart. Of course, it’s right and proper that you should pay attention to the fair sex; their youth and

beauty demand it; the honour of your regiment requires it; but you should not concentrate your attentions, my dear chap—you should not concentrate: they should be more general and less marked.”

But Jack was as sulky as a bear with a sore head, and would have no argument on the subject, so Montagu was obliged to have it all to himself. Not that that had any effect on his tongue; he never let Jack rest a moment.

“Ah, you may well look so blue,” he would cry, “with such a conscience as you must have—enough to give you the blue devils for the rest of your life! Think of the young affections you have blighted, think of the irreparable injury your heartless conduct has wrought, think of the gay hearth now made desolate, the light heart which will be light no more. Look at him, gentlemen”—appealing, after the manner of a counsel in a court of justice, to the grinning officers round about—“look at the depraved individual who stands before you, the male flirt. Ah, well well, Sinclair, of all my sins, and they are many, I do not carry on my conscience the shameful weight of young fresh affections trifled with, won, and thrown aside.”

Poor Jack! he met Dorothy often enough now. Dorothy always alone, with no Bryan Montagu in

attendance, but with, oh, such a blanched face, such a world of woe in the azure eyes, that if Jack had wished for revenge there it was. But Jack wished for nothing of the kind. The sight of his false love's white face only made him miserable, so utterly miserable that he could have fallen down upon his knees in the very street, and prayed her to try and look happier; he could have choked the very life out of Montagu as he sat sneering and jibing at the mess-table, only that would not give him back to Dorothy, or take away that piteous woe from her face. And then Montagu took his long leave, and Dorothy grew whiter and whiter, until at length he missed her altogether, and feared she must be ill.

Once or twice he felt half inclined to ignore the past and go and see her, but the remembrance that she was fretting for Montagu kept him back; she wanted Montagu, and Jack Sinclair would be of no use; and so when his turn came for long leave he went away, sore at heart as was ever Dorothy St. George, with her's breaking for love of the man who bore the nick-name of the Lady-Killer-in-Chief.



CHAPTER III.

THE Cuirassiers had left Blankhampton for Colchester, *en route* for India, and Dorothy St. George had seen nothing more of her two lovers since the day that Jack Sinclair went away on long leave. True, Bryan Montagu had called twice; but Dorothy had not seen him, being indisposed—otherwise lying on her bed in the exhaustion which usually comes after violent weeping. Mr. Montagu had stayed half an hour each time, talking serenely with Mrs. St. George, and left, with graceful regrets that Miss St. George was not well enough to see him; and that had been all, that was the end. And yet she could not forget the past; she was not allowed to go out of the house, for a terrible cough had taken hold of her; she could not rest anywhere: she thought herself that she was going mad. As the year drew to a close, and the day fixed for the embarkation of the regiment drew near, she persuaded her mother to take a daily paper, that she might see the latest, and indeed last, intelligence of them. She was not hard to persuade, for a great dread had come over her, lest her child, who was all she had in the world, should be taken from her; and so for a time the paper was left at the house

daily. The news about the Cuirassiers was but scanty, and Dorothy used to fling the paper down and sigh piteously each day, hoping that the next would tell more. And at last the sight of their own name caught her eye, and she for the first time looked at the paper with an interest unconnected with the Royal Regiment of Cuirassiers.

If this should meet the eye of Florence Meredith, who in September, 18—, was married in the parish church of Llangwylt, North Wales, by the Rev. David Meredith, to George St. George, gentleman, she is requested to communicate with Messrs. Owen, Lucas, and Co., Gray's-inn-road, London, when she will hear of something to her advantage.

Dorothy read it aloud to her mother.

"What does it mean?" she cried, thinking it might have something to do with—with—

"It is to say your father is dead," Mrs. St. George replied, an ashen hue overspreading her face.

"And you will write?"

"At once," she said, in a trembling voice. "If he has relented, things may be very different for us."

Two days passed by, and no reply came. Dorothy was wildly curious, fretfully impatient, and, when on the second morning the postman passed the house, intensely disappointed.

"I believe it is a hoax," she cried.

But it was not so. Towards noon an imperative knock resounded through the house, and the woman who had gone every day to help since

Dorothy's illness ushered into the tiny sitting-room a small grave gentleman, clad in black, and with an irreproachable white neckcloth.

"Mrs. St. George?" he said, with a grave bow.

"Yes," she answered, rather faintly. "Are you——"

"My name is Lucas. May I ask if this is your daughter?"

"That is Miss St. George," she answered, haughtily: the words "your daughter" rather angered her.

"Pardon me," said the little old gentleman, politely, "this lady," taking Dorothy's hand and leading her a step forward, "is the Countess of Beaurivage. You are now the countess dowager;" at which theatrically-told piece of news Dorothy burst out laughing, and her mother sat down and quietly fainted away.

Not only had great honour come upon them, but also great wealth. The lately deceased earl had managed, shortly before his death, to pick a violent quarrel with the heir-presumptive, and to annoy him had left a will giving an exact account of his marriage and what had taken place since, and leaving every farthing he possessed to his daughter; his wife he left unnoticed; but then, as Dorothy said, it didn't much matter.

And so the sailing of the *Crocodile* passed apparently out of mind.

The romantic story of the Earl of Beaurivage's marriage and the succession of the beautiful young girl to the title was naturally enough wafted into all the papers. Those containing it were handed on board the *Crocodile* at Malta, and read almost simultaneously by the two men who had known Dorothy St. George most intimately in her days of poverty.

"Think what you've missed, Sinclair," drawled Montagu; "who would have thought of little St. George turning out a countess in her own right? By Jove! it almost equals a novel?"

"I suppose you'll find it worth while to go back and marry her now?" said Jack, bitterly.

"Pooh! Not I! I amused myself with her; but as for marrying——" He did not finish the sentence, for Jack flew at him like a tiger, and flung him head-foremost down the companion ladder; whence Mr. Bryan Montagu was picked up extensively bruised, and very careful to give Jack as wide a berth as was compatible with the capabilities of the ship.

"Curse you!" Jack shouted after him. "I don't believe she would have you at any price!" And yet it puzzled him to guess why Dorothy had acted as she did.

One week the regiment remained after landing, at a place called Deolalee; and when they went forward to Unapore, they marched without Mr. Bryan Montagu, who returned to England by the next steamer. He had seen enough of India during these seven days, he said; but Jack Sinclair always felt, with a thrill of satisfaction, that he had something to do with his return. He had not forgotten the time, not far distant, when Bryan Montagu had talked of the delights of India with what was nothing short of rapture.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE years passed away before Jack Sinclair returned to his native shores. He did so then because he had come into his inheritance; for his father had gone into that higher region where such things as earthly riches and troubles have no place. But he died, blessing Jack to the last; and Jack had been sent for, reaching his home, alas, too late.

And so he was no longer Jack Sinclair the dragoon, troubled with numerous debts and other difficulties, but Sinclair of Cleve, the owner of a good estate, the head of a good county family.

It was perfectly astonishing how nice every one seemed to find him. The self-same people who had looked very much askance at "that dreadfully wild fellow, Jack Sinclair," found out that, after all, young men will be young men, and that wild-oats are best sown. Some ladies even went so far as to affirm that the wildest young men make the best husbands. *Those* were ladies with marriageable daughters.

But they angled and baited their traps for him in vain. Jack would have none of them. His mother remained the undisturbed mistress of Cleve, and his sisters declared he must have left his heart in India.

Jack said, "Exactly so;" and then they wondered why he hadn't married her? Effie suggested that perhaps she was married already; but the more strong-minded Laura scouted that idea altogether. She was sure Jack would not be such a fool as that. No, depend upon it, Jack did not feel altogether satisfied about her. Perhaps her family was not to his liking. That the lady might be unwilling never entered their heads. Was not Jack "Sinclair of Cleve," with seven thousand a year?

However, their conjectures brought them no nearer to the truth, since Jack turned a deaf

ear to all their hints, and invariably answered them with the same word, "Exactly."

"You ought to marry," Laura told him one day.

"Exactly," said Jack, easily.

"Then why don't you?" she asked. "I'm sure you're in love."

"Exactly."

To say the least of it, the answer was discouraging.

However, in love or out of it, Jack did not change his condition. He went about in the character of an eligible bachelor, and seemed to find the position a very pleasant one; at least, he certainly made no attempt to alter it. He had returned from India in the summer, and during the autumn and winter seemed as if he was trying to make up for the society he had missed during his sojourn in the East. The family at Cleve saw but little of him until Christmas, when he remained at home a whole fortnight. At the end of that time he went northwards to pay a long-promised visit at the house of a man who had been in the Cuirassiers when he first joined the regiment. He had a long and cold journey, arriving about an hour before dinner. Major Holroyd went out to the door to

meet him, with a thousand apologies for not having been at the station, three miles away.

"The fact was, my bailiff came in just as I was starting; and as his business was urgent—roof of a cottage tumbled in, worse luck!—why, I was obliged to go round and make some arrangements for the family until it can be attended to," he explained.

"It really did not matter," Jack answered. "How is Mrs. Holroyd? Oh, there you are!" as he followed his host into the inner hall. "How are you? And how's our old friend, Ethel?"

"Grown a monster," Mrs. Holroyd laughed. "You'll see her presently, no doubt. You'll have a cup of tea, Captain Sinclair? I remember your old weakness for it. I think you must know every one here, excepting perhaps Lady Beau-rivage."

Jack turned from a young lady who was greeting him effusively with a great start. Yes, there she was! The one love of his life. No longer pale, no longer with that look of hunted pain in her great azure eyes; but calm, smiling, self-possessed; and sitting near to her was Bryan Montagu. Jack determined, as he held out his hand with a grave bow, that his visit at Lark's

Nest would be cut short on the following day by a plea of "urgent private affairs."

"Then you do know her?" Mrs. Holroyd cried, seeing the friendly, yet half-distant salutation.

"I used to know Captain Sinclair," answered Lady Beaurivage, distinctly, "very well indeed; but, for some reason or other, he cut me."

"Dead as a door-nail," Montagu affirmed.

"I cannot believe that," cried Mrs. Holroyd, emphatically.

"It is quite true," answered Lady Beaurivage, calmly; "ask him if it is not so."

"I won't ask you, Captain Sinclair, because I have too much faith in you to believe it," said the hostess.

"Unfortunately it is perfectly true," Jack returned, gravely.

"Why?" some one asked, thoughtlessly.

"Why?" he repeated. "Oh! you must get Lady Beaurivage to tell you that!" at which the young countess blushed so vividly crimson that every one laughed; and Mrs. Holroyd, to spare her further confusion, made a move, and carried her off to dress.

"Of course there's no truth in all that nonsense about your cutting her?" Major Holroyd asked, when he and Jack were left in possession of the hall.

“Oh yes, it’s true enough,” Jack answered, bitterly. “If I’d known she was staying here, I shouldn’t have come, and as it is, I think I had better leave you to-morrow.”

“But what on earth has she done?”

“It was just this way: Lady Beaurivage was engaged to me, and jilted me—for Montagu. That’s the whole story, Holroyd, and the less I see of her for the future, the better.”

“Then why doesn’t she marry Montagu?”

“Sure I don’t know,” Jack returned, forlornly.

“Because,” Major Holroyd continued, “he has been running after her for three years, to my certain knowledge. He worships the very ground she walks on, and she always *seems* as if she detests him. To be sure, one never can tell what a woman is up to,” he ended; “but, at all events, Jack, I don’t see that they need drive you away from us; you’ve done nothing to be ashamed of.”

“No, exactly,” Jack answered.

“Then you’ll stay?”

“Yes, I’ll stay,” holding out his hand and gripping his friend’s hard, a display of feeling of which he repented instantly, and marched off upstairs, wishing he hadn’t made such a fool of himself. All the same, Major Holroyd, standing staring

reflectively into the fire, did not consider he had made a fool of himself at all.

“Queer concern that,” he muttered. “I’ll keep an eye upon them.”

So he did; but he learnt remarkably little. The intercourse between Lady Beaurivage and Mr. Montagu was exactly as it had been aforetime—abject worship on his part, persistent snubbing on hers. Jack Sinclair kept aloof from both of them, and spent most of his time with small Ethel, a child of ten, who had been a great pet of his in the old days, before he fell in love with Dorothy St. George, otherwise Lady Beaurivage—and time slipped on.

He came in one afternoon after a long day’s hunting, tired and wet, having missed all the others and returned alone. Just as he reached the hall he saw Lady Beaurivage, with three of the children clinging about her, coming down the stairs; and as he never met her, if by any chance he could possibly avoid her, he slipped into the library, thinking they would be going on to the drawing-room. A moment later, however, the door of the library opened, and the four, not seeing the red-coated figure in one of the deep window-seats, entered, and went to the other end of the room, where was the fire-place. His first impulse was to get up and go away, but he could not do that

without speaking to Dorothy, and if he did so, Ethel would instantly entreat him to stay; therefore he remained where he was, almost hidden by the curtain, and listened patiently while Dorothy related a long fairy tale.

“And then they were married, and lived happily ever after,” said the soft voice, tenderly, bringing the story to an abrupt termination.

“Well, and what then?” Dick asked, eagerly; “what then, Dolly?”

“Oh! nothing more than that,” she answered, with a soft laugh: “what more would you have?”

“People are always happy when they get married,” put in Ethel, wisely.

“Who told you that?” Dorothy laughed.

“Captain Sinclair said so, because this morning I told him Jinks was going to be married, and he said, ‘Happy Jinks!’ Would you like to be married, Dolly?”

“It would quite depend,” Dorothy said, guardedly.

“If it was Mr. Montagu?” Ethel suggested.

“Oh no, not at all!” very emphatically.

“If it was Captain Sinclair? He’s very nice, you know, Dolly.”

“Is he?”

“I like Captain Sinclair best of any one I know,”

Ethel returned, critically; "and he's got the prettiest dressing-case I ever saw. And he's going to buy me a watch and chain when he goes back to town—a real one, you know; so, Dick, you may have the old one mother's keeping for me. I say, Dolly, if it was Captain Sinclair?"

"Captain Sinclair would not have me," said Lady Beaurivage, with what sounded to Jack like a sigh.

"I'll ask him, if you like," Ethel cried, obligingly.

"No, thank you," with a genuine laugh.

"Tell us another story, Dolly, do," put in Jim, imploringly.

"Do you know that the bell has rung for the nursery tea?" Lady Beaurivage asked, "and that you were promised some honey?"

"I forgot. Come, Dick, Ethel, let us be off;" and away the three youngsters scampered, leaving the library to the other two occupants.

"And so they got married and lived happily ever after," said one of them, moving forward into the firelight.

Lady Beaurivage started violently, and jumped up from her seat.

"I did not know you were there," she exclaimed, confusedly, wondering anxiously if he had heard what Ethel said about himself.

“My little friend, Ethel,” he said, coolly, “asked you if you would like to marry Montagu, and you said, ‘Oh no, not at all!’ If it is not too impertinent, may I ask why you did not give the same reply when she asked you another question?”

Lady Beaurivage remained silent, and Jack continued :

“Would not the same reply have done? And how is it you have not married Montagu?”

“Ugh!” cried Lady Beaurivage, without much dignity, but with a very large amount of expression, at which Jack laughed out aloud. It might be that the laugh gave her courage, but certain it is that she put out her two pretty hands with an imploring gesture, and faltered, “Don’t be cross with me any more, Jack!” She seemed to have parted with her dignity altogether.

A heart of adamant must have melted before those azure eyes shining through a mist of tears; and Jack’s heart was not of an adamantine quality, so far as Dorothy was concerned; and so somehow his arms found their way round her, and the golden head was pillowed on his breast.

“What did you do it for?” he asked after a while, without much regard for grammar.

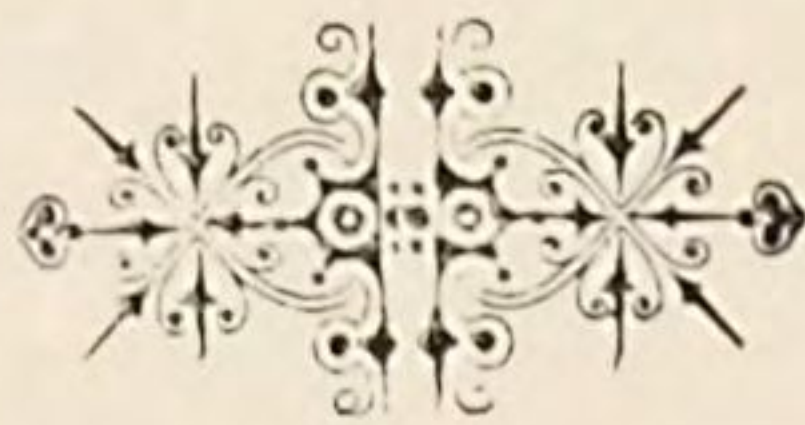
And then she told him of the conversation she overheard, and how she had determined to pay

the Lady-Killer out in his own coin, never considering that Jack would object.

“And I thought afterwards,” she stammered, “that perhaps you only wanted an excuse to get out of it.”

“Oh, my darling!” Jack cried, reproachfully.

And so they were married, and lived happily ever afterwards.



THE SAD HISTORY OF BOB SABRETASCHE.

"Fools climb to fall: fond hopes, like seeled doves for want of better light, mount, till they end their flight with falling."—*J. Reading.*

WHEN Bob Sabretasche was a youngster old Sabretasche *père* was frequently asked a question, to which he always made Bob reply—this was the question:

"And what are you going to make of Bob?"

The major invariably passed the question on to head-quarters. "Bob! what are you going to be?"

"A soldier," was Bob's prompt reply.

"And what branch of the service are you going into, pray?" he would further question, with many signs of suppressed delight on his sun-burnt face.

"Well—I won't be a dirty mud-crusher"—only five-year-old Bob pronounced it *cwusher*.

"Now, sir," or "Now, madam," as the case might be, the major would cry, with honest pride, "there's a proof for you that 'what's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh.'"

"You need not be vulgar, major," put in Mrs. Sabretasche, with quiet severity. Mrs. Sabretasche was a large, fair, placid woman, possessed of very decided ideas as to right and wrong, but

without sufficient energy of mind or body to do more than utter a feeble protest against the latter, while she did nothing at all to further the cause of the former. She folded her large white hands, lifted her expressionless blue eyes to her laughing husband, and remarked quietly—as if she was saying “How fine a day it is”—

“You need not be vulgar, major.”

“Pooh! nonsense, Maria, my dear—nonsense! The lad’s vocation in life is chosen—it was born with him. Bless you—he is but just five years old.”

“Six next month,” interposed the wife of his bosom, indifferently.

“Well, nearly six then—what matter does it make? He’s a mere baby still; and,” turning to his visitor triumphantly, “I assure you he runs up his ‘ticks’ in the village as regularly as if he were five-and-twenty.”

“And who taught him that, I should like to know?” asked Mrs. Sabretasche, with something like warmth. “He ought to have been whipped.”

“Pooh! nonsense, my dear. I tell you ‘what’s bred in the bone,’ etc. It’s born with the lad—born in him. He’s a regular dragoon in miniature at five years old—well, nearly six, then—that is five, isn’t it? A clever little chap he is, though I say it, that shouldn’t. Bob!”

“Ya-ath,” returned the youngster, in a drawling voice, which sounded delightfully absurd on his juvenile lisping tongue.

“What do you say when you don’t want to go to bed? Hey? What a—what a—”

“D—d bore,” finished the baby, in a tone of quiet indifference, which showed he was ignorant of the signification of the words. Then, interrupting his father’s proud noisy mirth, “I say, father, mother took me to church to-day and I saw—” dropping his voice and speaking very impressively —“I saw—*the Devil!*”

“Eh! bless my soul—WHAT!” exclaimed the major, jumping almost out of his chair.

“Now you see the result of your teaching,” put in Mrs. Sabretasche, in a tone of desperate resignation; “it was old Sir George’s monument that we went in to see.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed the major, uproariously, “the boy’s not so far out of it, after all! Old George Leroy was as nearly akin to the old gentleman as human beings ever go. Bless the lad, he’s a real Sabretasche—a chip of the old block; bless me, and only five years old.”

“And father,” Bob continued, climbing on to the major’s knee and sitting with one hand squared on his hip, like a dragoon on horseback, “Tom

Leslie put his tongue out at me this morning and said I was a molly-coddle. I'm not a molly-coddle, now am I?"

"That depends upon what you said to him," answered the major, gravely.

"Well," said small Bob, with a long sigh, "I said I *might* be a molly-coddle, but if he called me so again, I'd just punch his head."

"Quite right too," remarked the major, with infinite satisfaction, and looking as stern as his pride and laughter would permit.

"Such a volley of abuse Bob poured out," complained Mrs. Sabretasche; "I would have given him a good whipping, only, it's no use beating the child for your fault—and it is your fault, major."

"Now look here, Maria," said the major, with much decision, "a soldier's one thing and a parson's another. If you wished for a parson, you should have married a parson; but you didn't, you married a Sabretasche, of whom you must just make the best, and, what is more, you must not grumble if my boy takes after me, it's only natural that he should. The Sabretasches have always been soldiers—they take to the army as young ducks to water, and I won't have the Sabretasche traits of character knocked out of him—you must simply make the best of us both."

That was the principle upon which young Bob's education was completed—the result of that education I will relate in the pages which follow.

Young Bob went through the usual course of training which boys of his class undergo. From the hands of a tutor to Eton, and from Eton to Sandhurst, at which place he lost a year's seniority for insubordination, or some such misdemeanour. He received the news with characteristic coolness—characteristic of both parents, for it combined his mother's quiet calmness with his father's spirit of don't-careish dare-devilism; that is to say, he touched his cap when the decision of the powers-that-be was communicated to him, said, "Very well, sir," and went out of the awful presence—and laughed.

"What will your governor say?" a friend asked him.

"Say? That they're a set of thick-headed old idiots," answered Bob, laughing yet more. "Just the way they served him—so he can't say anything to me, if he feels inclined."

However, when Bob went home, with two months' leave and a commission as sub-lieutenant in that most distinguished regiment, the Scarlet Lancers, old Sabretasche was far too proud of him to cavil at so trivial a matter as the loss

of a year's seniority. He superintended all the details of Bob's outfit with a delight only to be equalled by that of a bride selecting her *trousseau*. He coached him in all the etiquette of the mess-room—no small task that—and on parting he gave one piece of advice—one only.

“Now, look here, Bob,” he said, as they were driving through the green lanes on their way to the station, “there's one thing I should like to say to you before you go.”

“All right,” said Bob, cheerfully, flicking at the flies as he spoke.

“I lay no restrictions upon you,” said the gallant old major, rather wistfully; “I never have done, I don't think I have ever bullied you in any way.”

“'Deed, no,” returned Bob, readily.

“And I should like to feel that I can trust to your honour, never to play a woman false. It's a wrong once done, Bob, that you never get over as long as you live, a remembrance of that kind comes back to you years after you'd fain forget all about it.”

Bob looked down from his high driving-seat a little curiously at the handsome flushed old face, which his own so strongly resembled.

“I say, father,” he remarked at last, “are you speaking from experience?”

"Perhaps I am," he admitted, "but take my advice about it, Bob."

"I think I will," said Bob, quietly.

Not another word was spoken between them till they reached the little country station, whence Bob departed for Colchester, where his regiment was quartered.

"Good-bye, Bob, my boy—bless you," cried the major, rather huskily, as the train started.

"Dear old chap," murmured Bob, as he lit a cigar and put his feet on the opposite seat. "By Jove! though, who'd have thought he had ever gone in for the character of a gay Lothario?"

Arrived at Colchester, Bob betook himself and his belongings in a fly to the barracks, drawing up in front of the mess with considerable clatter and dash—taking into account that after all it was only a fly.

He jumped out and addressed himself to one of two officers in undress uniform, who were standing in the door-way.

"Er—good morning," said Bob, in no wise abashed.

"Good morning," said the latter of the twain, with civility.

"I suppose you are officers of the Scarlet

Lancers," Bob remarked, blandly. "My name is Sabretasche, er——"

"Oh! Sabretasche-*er*, is it?" interrupted the officer, with an amused smile. "Well, Mr. Sabretasche-*er*, I suppose you've come to join?"

"Exactly-*er*," returned Bob, easily. "Where shall I find my quarters, and can I report myself to the colonel at once?"

"Well, as I happen to be the colonel, you can," said his new friend, smiling, while the shorter man laughed outright.

Bob was, however, thoroughly equal to the occasion, awkward as it was. He took off his hat, displaying a handsome curly head, and said, with the utmost gravity, as if he had not spoken before, "I have the honour to present myself, sir."

"As for quarters," the colonel continued, "this is Mr. Smithers, the quarter-master."

Taking this as an introduction, Bob looked at the quarter-master and said, "How do?" with a nod of the curtest description.

Just at that moment, two other officers appeared round the corner, to whom Colonel Keith introduced the new arrival.

"And Wingfield," he said to the younger of them, "just look after Mr. Sabretasche to-day, and put him in the way of things generally."

“Certainly, sir,” answered Wingfield.

He entered the cab with Bob, and drove off to the quarters allotted to him. The colonel stood where they left him, looking after the retreating vehicle.

“I’ve no doubt he’ll make a smart soldier,” he remarked, when he had watched it quite out of sight, “but he’ll want a good deal of his d——d cheek taking out of him.”

Notwithstanding that such was the opinion of their commanding officer, the Scarlet Lancers did not find Bob Sabretasche’s “cheek” so very easy to eradicate. He had been too well coached by his old father to make any mistakes in his intercourse with his senior officers—the respectful “sir” with which he addressed his colonel or major, the quiet air of deference with which he received their opinions, when they were contrary to his own, at the same time sticking resolutely to his original sentiments—all were faultless, and the senior sub. had no occasion to polish off Bob’s education on that point. He submitted to be drawn with imperturbable good nature; in fact, so good that they soon found there was no fun in disturbing him, for was he not always as ready for a midnight frolic as they were? He was thoroughly well up in mess-room etiquette, and was never to be caught tripping

in those little matters which necessitate the imposition of a fine.

And so the first terrible months—or what are usually so—passed over for Bob Sabretasche very easily; and then he was summoned home by a telegram, telling him that the large, handsome, serene woman, who had been so placidly careful of his morals, was dead, and his father left alone.

Bob took the news badly. In all his twenty years of life he had never had such a blow as that. In truth, he had never had a blow of any kind except in the matter of that year of seniority, which he had taken as a joke. When the telegram arrived he was at lunch, and, just when about to put it into his pocket, he saw, with a great start, that it was from ———, near which town was his father's house. He happened to be sitting just opposite to the colonel, and asked, by a look, if he might open it. The chief nodded, and Bob, under cover of the cloth, tore open the yellow wrapper.

“Your mother died this morning; pray come.”

For a moment Bob sat perfectly still, then, feeling his composure giving way, flung the telegram with etiquette to the winds, and rushed out of the room.

“What's the matter?” asked the chief, as the door closed with a great crash.

The man nearest to Bob's vacated place picked

up the telegram and glanced at the brief sentences which conveyed so much.

“His mother is dead, sir,” he said, quietly.

“Ah!” murmured the superior, comprehensively, with a sigh to the memory of a gentle woman who had passed away twenty years before. He continued speaking, but, later, he went up to Bob’s room, and told him to get home as soon as possible. “I’ll arrange your leave,” he ended, kindly.

And so Bob Sabretasche went home to the old house where he had lived and been happy, but, alas! in which he would live and be happy never more. That telegram was but the beginning of the end. The death of the fair placid woman whom he had loved broke the old soldier down utterly, and within six months Bob found himself alone in the world, with no near relatives, but one-and-twenty years of age, and with a fortune of as many thousand pounds entirely at his own disposal.

Just at first he was too much stunned by his double loss to do anything more than his duty. He did do that in a dull, mechanical way which presently put him on the sick-list, and gave the doctor no small amount of trouble; and then Time, the comforter—who does such wonders for all of us—took him in hand, and smoothed the harsh lines of his sorrow into the more tender

lineaments of a loving recollection, so that by the time the regiment moved its quarters to Lili-minster, he was able to enter with great zest into all sporting pursuits, and found a good deal of enjoyment in the pleasures of society.

The better to cultivate both, Bob set up a stud of fourteen hunters, likewise the smartest Stanhope phaeton which could possibly be procured; for that he had two high-stepping chesnut cobs, which, with a couple of chargers, brought the total number of his stud up to eighteen—and, be it remembered, his income was about a thousand a-year. For a year or so he certainly went the pace. Quoth one of his friends to him one day,

“I don’t know what your income is, Bob, but if it is anything under eight thousand a year, you must be a fool.”

“Income be bothered,” returned Bob, carelessly. “Come round and look at my coach—it’s a clipper, out-and-out the smartest I have seen for ever so long.”

Yes, the crowning point of Bob Sabretasche’s folly was to set up a coach and team of his own. He threw his money right and left like water—water which cost him nothing—and, at three-and-twenty, had managed to get so nearly

through his one-and-twenty thousand pounds, that he pulled himself up sharp one fine morning, and wondered what the deuce would be the end of it all?

His sudden awakening came in this wise. A few days before he had received an intimation from his bankers to the effect that his account was over-drawn. He at once telegraphed to his lawyer for money, and from that acute gentleman had by return of post a letter suggesting, since his patrimony was reduced to five thousand pounds, the advisability of not further lessening it. Bob awoke from his course of reckless extravagance like a somnambulist suddenly recalled to consciousness. Since his father's death he had never given money-matters a thought. He had been terribly cut up by the loss of his parents so near together, and had taken to spending money more for something to do than from any other cause. He had fancied it would be very jolly to have fourteen hunters, a coach and team, and the cleverest cobs in the service, but as to how those luxuries were to be paid for had simply never occurred to him. Had he not, from earliest childhood, been accustomed to have anything or everything for which he felt the smallest inclination?

He sat, with the lawyer's letter in his hand, for a long, long time, looking thoughtfully into the fire. Well, he had gone the pace, there was no doubt about that. It had been great fun whilst it lasted, but, after all, he didn't know that he was not growing rather tired of it all. This continual visiting, the dodging of gracious mammas with young and lovely daughters, and daughters also neither young nor lovely. How they had tracked him down, to be sure! He glanced up at the dozens of pressing invitations for the month to come, which were lying about the chimney-piece, and in spite of his suddenly sobered senses, burst into a fit of hearty laughter at the thought of the time and pains which had been taken, and wasted, in trying to hook him—really wasted, for was he not, after all, of the worst class of detrimentals: a poor man, with expensive tastes? The laughter soon ceased as the stern reality came back to him again with ten-fold vigor.

“By George! what a fool I have been,” he said, emphatically.

Still, it was no use crying over spilt milk, no man can eat his cake and have it. Bob had undoubtedly partaken very greedily of his. As he sat there in the twilight of that cold

March day, with the red fire-glow playing over his handsome face—from out of which all the carelessness and fun had been driven—two or three lines came into his mind, lines which he had read ever so long ago, when he had been young—Bob felt that he had grown awfully old since then; when he had not taken to squandering money like an idiot or a cotton-spinning cad—as he told himself, wrathfully; when he had had a dear, good, gallant old father, to whom he could have carried all his troubles and had kindly advice. Yes! it was in those far-away happy days, which were never to return again, that he had read them, little dreaming how soon the time would come when they would be applicable to himself:

Fools climb to fall: fond hopes, like seeled doves for want of better light, mount, till they end their flight with falling.

“And—oh! Lord,” Bob groaned, “I have been a confounded idiot, and serve me right to come such a cropper.”

And then he roused himself, with a mental shake, and looked round the pretty room. It was pretty, in spite of the take-to-piece-able barrack-room furniture. The walls were hung with pictures from cornice to dado—yes, Bob had the room decorated in that style; there were velvet-hung brackets, a

superb flounce of lace, worked by the hand of some fair lady, adorned the chimney-valance; there were hot-house flowers and rare old china in profusion, so that the whole was tasteful and pretty. Well, he thought, with a sigh, there would not surely be any need to disturb that. The little trifles had cost a good deal, to be sure, but if sold they would fetch very little, and he did not exactly wish all his brother officers to know how deeply he was dipped, therefore, he concluded to let the room remain untouched. He got a bit of paper, and jotted down what he had left out of the wreck of his fortune :

£5,000—capital.

Well! that wasn't so bad to begin with, he thought, with an attempt—a very poor one, too—at self-comfort. Five thousand pounds! Why, it was only the other day that he met a man—a cotton-spinning fellow—at Lord Agate's, who had given as many guineas for a necklace for his daughter, and thought nothing of it; and now that sum was all Bob had in the world, except what he might be able to realise from the sale of his horses and so on. Queer little thing that same daughter was—little, slim, rather ugly thing, with a wide mouth, very soft eyes, and no shape to speak of.

“I believe she was spooney on me,” Bob said, aloud, to the walls or his reflection in the glass maybe; “yes, sir, sure she was, and she was engaged to a fat, vulgar old brute, thirty years older than herself, she told me. Poor little soul. Queer sort of taste, though, he must have. Lord! I wouldn’t have kissed her for a thousand pounds.”

But it was no use thinking about Lily Ray or Lily anybody else. So he returned anew to his calculation, as to what he might reasonably expect his horses to bring him. Bob didn’t quite know whether fourteen hunters were not too many for any man—it was hard work to keep them all fit. Fourteen hunters—put ’em at a hundred a-piece. Very few of them were of less value than that, whilst most of them were worth a good deal more. If they fetched a little more, the difference would pay off any little debts that might be standing. We must do Bob the justice to say that he had no debts to speak of. “Well, then:

“Capital	£5,000.
“Hunters	£1,400.
“Coach	£150.
“Team	£400.

“The coach cost three hundred guineas,” Bob thought ruefully, “and I’ve only had it a few months: it ought to fetch a hundred and fifty—I’ll put it at that. The team is worth six hundred—every penny

of it—but I suppose I shall have to throw them away at four. Oh—h! Lord! but this is a bad business—

"Capital	£5,000.
"Hunters	£1,400.
"Coach	£150.
"Team	£400.
"Pay.....	—

"Umph! goes in expenses!

"Total..... £6,950.

"Total, six thousand—nine hundred—and—fifty," Bob mused; "call it seven thousand. Well, seven thousand, at five per cent.—three-fifty a year. How the deuce am I to live on three-fifty a year and a subaltern's pay? I suppose the phaeton and the cobs must go—though I did hope to be able to keep one of them, at least."

He sat working out this unpleasant problem for a long, long time, without much success, and then, somehow, his mind wandered off to Lily Ray and her five-thousand-guinea necklace. What a little ugly thing she was. At least, perhaps not exactly ugly, but she'd a very wide mouth, and no shape at all. She was, somehow, *unkissable*.

"Now, Jinks; what is it?"

"Well, sir—it's a lady," returned the man, holding the door in his hand.

"A lady! Oh! the devil—tell her I'm out," Bob answered, shortly—he did not want troubling with any ladies, just then.

The man departed, closing the door after him, and Bob thought to hear no more of his visitor, but, a moment later, a querulous, imperious voice rang through the corridor, which caused Bob to spring from his seat in double-quick time.

“Which are Mr. Sabretasche’s rooms? Show me at once. I will wait until he comes in,” it said.

Bob flung his door open, and a tiny creature, robed in rich furs and closely veiled, stepped out of the darkness into the circle of light cast by the fire. In the background stood Jinks in silent amazement—perhaps he doubted for a moment if the small creature might be a fairy or not, only the ordinary cavalry soldier is not a speculative animal—but as his master shut the door in his face, he concluded that all was right, and departed about his business.

As the door closed, the visitor tore her veil aside, and flung—literally flung herself into Bob’s astonished arms.

“My dear Miss Ray,” he gasped, “what does this mean?”

“Dear, darling Bob,” cried the poor little person, clinging to him convulsively, “they’ve been so cruel to me—oh! so cruel to me. Look,” pulling back the furs from her small wrists and displaying the white skin all bruised and livid. The sight elicited a cry of horror from Bob, and an

ugly sharp word from between his teeth. "Oh! I hated him so—I couldn't marry him," Lily went on, with a great shuddering horror in her tones and in her soft eyes—the eyes were really pretty, if nothing else was—"and papa said he would *make* me love him; but he could not," triumphantly, "for I love—you."

"But you don't mean to say he used personal violence towards you?" Bob cried, aghast.

"I'm black and blue all over," she answered, confidently.

"Low beast," cried Bob, with emphasis.

"Just what I told him," remarked Miss Ray, with a long sigh. "However, it doesn't matter, I'm all safe with you."

Poor Bob trembled in his shoes—did this little body expect him to *marry* her? Bob was absolutely sick at the bare idea of it.

"What made you think of coming to me?" he said, abruptly.

The soft eyes turned upon him in reproachful surprise. "Why—have you forgotten your promise?" she asked, with quivering lips.

"Did I promise you anything?" he said, tenderly, for, after all, if he did not admire her, she was a woman, and he was mindful of those cruel bruises. "What was it that I promised?"

“Oh!” cried the poor child, with a sob of terror—she was but seventeen—“you promised me, if ever I needed a friend, I might come to you and trust you to take care of me. Don’t you remember? It was the night of the ball at Lord Agate’s. You *cannot* have forgotten it,” she ended, with a wail of despair.

“To be sure not, certainly not,” he said, soothingly, though he had no recollection of it whatever.

“I don’t believe you even remember it,” she said, sorrowfully, “you *said* you liked me and I believed you, but, after all, you don’t want me, and if I go back they will kill me. Oh! they will kill me!” shrinking back with every appearance of terror. “So cruel they were—how they hurt me. I didn’t care so much then. I thought I could get away to you and be safe, but you did not mean it at all, and you don’t want me.”

For a moment Bob stood irresolute, trying to think! He looked at the swollen, bruised wrists of this poor little soul, who had flown to him for protection, relying on his promise. Then a sudden recollection came over him of the day when he joined his regiment: how he had driven his father to the station, and the dear gallant old man had asked him—the only favour he ever remembered him asking—never to play a woman false! In

that brief moment of reflection he remembered that he had squandered his father's fortune—that his father was dead! Should he then fail to keep his promise to his dead father, the very first time he was tried? Assuredly not! If his whole life was to be sacrificed, it would only be a slight reparation to the gallant memory he had so soon forgotten.

"You may trust me to take care of you, Lily," he said, kindly, bending down and laying his hand on her shoulder. She flinched from the touch, gentle as it was, thereby forcing another oath from between Bob's teeth.

"Good heavens, child!" he cried, passionately incredulous, "you don't mean to say that they really struck you? That you cannot bear to be touched?"

"I daresay it will soon go off," she said, trying to be brave, though the tears were stealing down her cheeks, "and—and you won't send me back?"

"On my word—no!" he answered.

And then he turned to the fire, trying once more to *think*—to realize his position. He was not at all sure, since Lily was only seventeen, that he could marry her legally without the consent of her father; of course, he would have to marry her, and equally of course, Mr. Ray would not

consent. Then again, what the deuce were they to live upon? Three-fifty a-year and his pay? It was absurd! He sat down on the sofa beside her and took her hand in his—very carefully this time.

“Do you know, Lily, that I am a poor man?” he asked.

“Really? I thought you were very well off,” she said, placidly.

“But I am not, indeed. I have been very reckless and extravagant since my father died, and I have only about four hundred a-year left.”

“Ah! I am so tired of being rich,” she cried, gladly; “it will be ever so much nicer to be poor; you don’t know.”

“I don’t, indeed,” said Bob, doubtfully.

“I’ve ever so much money with me,” Lily went on, producing her purse “I wish you would take care of it, please, I might have it stolen; and Bob, dear, will you go and pay the cabman, and tell him to bring my luggage up here?”

“Your luggage!” Bob gasped; “my poor child, you *cannot* stop here. Don’t you know that this is a barrack?”

“To be sure; I told the man to drive here,” she said, innocently; “why, soldiers always live in a barrack, don’t they?”

Bob fairly groaned aloud ; however, he went and paid the man, and had the luggage—a goodly pile of it—taken upstairs.

“How did you manage to get off?” he asked.

“Papa went to London with—*him*, to get a special license,” she said, simply, “so I packed up all I thought I should want and—*me voilà*.”

“And when does he return?”

“Not until to-morrow morning,” clapping her hands gaily, “when he will find me—gone.”

“Well, I must be ‘gone,’ too, to make some arrangements for your accommodation,” Bob said, ruefully.

“But you will come back?”

“Oh! yes—in a few minutes.”

He went hastily to the colonel’s house, and knocked at the door of his sitting-room.

“Are you busy, sir?” he asked, as he entered.

Colonel Keith looked up from his writing, “Oh! is it you, Sabretasche? Yes! I am rather busy. What is it?”

“I’ve got into a terrible mess, sir,” Bob said, wistfully; “but perhaps the major will help me, if you are too busy.”

“No, no, sit down and tell me all about it,” the chief replied. He made a rule of always encouraging the confidences of his subalterns, when-

ever he could: so Bob sat down and told him all about it.

“What had I better do, sir?” he ended.

“Do you say the girl is here?”

“Up in my room, sir.”

“She can’t stop there, that’s very certain,” said the chief, hurriedly; “we’d better see if Mrs. Wilson will take charge of her.” Mrs. Wilson was the adjutant’s wife, and lived in the upper part of the colonel’s house. “You see, Sabretasche, I can’t help you in this matter, as I’m not a married man; if I had been, I would have taken her home at once.”

“You are very good, sir,” Bob said, gratefully.

“It’s a very unpleasant business to be mixed up with,” he went on; “you see, if the father chooses to be awkward, he can withhold his consent altogether.”

“Exactly! That is what I thought,” said Bob.

“And you say they have positively beaten the child?”

“Her wrists are as black as my coat, sir,” Bob returned, indignantly.

“And I suppose you’ve been in love with her all along?”

“In love with her!” Bob echoed. “Oh, dear no! The fact is, she has come to me, relying on

a foolish promise, made in jest, from which, of course, I cannot go back now. Well, sir, I'll go round and see what I can do with Mrs. Wilson."

"I'll come with you," said Colonel Keith, kindly.

The adjutant's tender-hearted little wife did not, however, wait to hear the whole of Bob's story, but rushed impulsively to his room, and did not so much as wait to put on her bonnet. A few minutes later Lily found herself by her new friend's fire, her feet on a stool, a cup of tea in her hand, her adoring eyes fixed on Bob's face, and her ears filled with the muttered exclamations of half-a-dozen stalwart officers, who had already heard the story, and were one and all ready to pay Mr. Ray and—*him* back in their own coin with ample interest. Poor little Lily had never been made so much of during all her seventeen years of life; to her it was all delightful. The tall, and for the most part, good-looking officers in their handsome mess dress, the kindly affectionate hostess, and her lover, Bob. Oh! it was like fairy-land to her. She gave no thought to the future, she had almost forgotten the past, and so little did she look below the surface of the present that she never noticed how sorely troubled Bob was. How was she to know that his very soul was sick at the thought of his marriage, while his poor brain was puzzling over the miserable question, how

were they to live on four hundred a-year? If she had known precisely what was passing in his mind, she could scarcely have understood his feelings—she loved him ! She had never looked at the other side of the question. As for money, she had always had so much of it that poverty was only a name to her : she knew nothing of its stings. For the present, she was exalted into a heroine, and the worship she received was very pleasant to her.

The following day Colonel Keith and Bob went over to Weystone Hall, Mr. Ray's residence. They found him at home and apparently in that state of calm which invariably succeeds a storm. He was a little, burly, ill-tempered looking man, evidently standing in much awe of the stern-looking gentleman commanding the Scarlet Lancers.

Colonel Keith stated his business in a clear and concise manner, ending by *demanding*—not asking—for a written consent to his daughter's marriage with Mr. Robert Sabretasche.

“I'll never speak to the hussy again !” roared the irate father, breaking into a passion once more.

“Will you have the goodness to sign this paper?” asked the colonel, calmly.

“She's no daughter of mine, sir,” screamed Ray *père*.

“The law, however, rules otherwise,” answered

the colonel, with provoking coolness; "will you sign it or not? If not, we shall procure a summons immediately for assault and battery."

"Sign it, yes, and be glad to be rid of her!" Ray roared; "only, young gentleman, don't think as 'ow you're going to get any of my money"—in his excitement long disused terms cropped up again—"you've played fast and loose with me, and the girl's all you'll get."

Bob turned his nose skywards in huge contempt, but kept silent: he had immense faith in his chief's conversational powers.

"Now, sir," said Colonel Keith, when he had put the signed and witnessed paper carefully into his pocket-book and buttoned his coat over it, "let me tell you, sir, that you are, without exception, the most scoundrelly, cowardly cad I ever spoke to or ever heard of in my whole life. You say *you* disown your daughter, but, if ever she speaks to you again she'll be a confounded fool—there, sir."

After which the pair stalked out of the house, leaving the astonished owner literally beside himself with rage and fury.

"Sabretasche," said the chief, when they were in the train again, "we've done that fellow in the eye; I've not only got a written consent to the

marriage, but also resigning all claim to any personal property, money, or jewelry, which Miss Ray may have taken away with her—properly witnessed, too.”

“It really is awfully good of you, colonel,” said Bob, even in the moment of victory unable to repress a sigh.

“I’m sorry, though, that you don’t think more about her, poor little thing,” he continued.

All the chivalry in Bob’s nature rose up at the words. “Oh! it’s all right sir,” he said, hastily; “I shall not illuse her,” at which assertion Colonel Keith laughed heartily.

A fortnight followed, during which Lily Ray remained as the guest of the adjutant’s wife, and Bob contrived to make arrangements for disposing of his horses and setting his affairs somewhat in order. The hardest pang of all was parting with the cobs, but they had to go—happily for Bob’s peace of mind, not much under their proper value.

On the whole, his “effects” realized more than he had expected, so that he was able to pay just over three thousand pounds into his bankers’ hands. His small *fiancée*, having had this step in view for some months, had spent very little and saved the pocket-money her wealthy father had lavished upon her. Thus they had nearly three hundred pounds between them to go on with, which, considering

the doleful condition of their joint circumstances, was not so bad. Still, how to keep a wife on five hundred a-year was an unsolvable problem to the man who had been living at the rate of some seven thousand a-year.

"I don't know how we shall manage it, Lily," he said, the day before the wedding.

"Manage what?" she asked.

"Why *living*, of course—we shall only have about five hundred a-year, all told," he answered, gloomily.

The poor child slid down upon her knees before him. "Am I a great bother to you?" she asked, wistfully.

If worried and unwilling, Bob was still a gentleman and kind of heart. "No, no, child," he said, hastily; "only we must live somehow, and neither of us have tried pinching before."

"I shall not want any clothes for an age," she said, confidently. "I've been expecting something of this sort—though I didn't know you were so poor—so I bought a few silk dresses. I have them at the bottom of one of my boxes—not made up, you know."

"Oh! but I don't know that dresses cost so much," said Bob, carelessly.

"Oh! but they do, indeed—a lot. That jacket

cost a hundred guineas," pointing to her sables lying on the sofa; "but, of course, it will not last a lifetime."

"Well, but Lily—it is servants and house-keeping and all that," he said, in a perplexed tone.

"Oh! do you want many servants?—they're such a nuisance—poking and prying into everything one does, and counting the mouthfuls one eats—I hate them."

Bob shivered—he did not hate servants.

"And you know, Bob, dear, there are my jewels. We can sell them. I don't care for them. I shall love your two rings better than all the diamonds on earth."

"Oh! we can't sell your jewelry—besides, it won't be worth much," Bob answered.

"Not worth much!" she echoed. "Ten thousand pounds, if a penny. Why, my necklace cost five thousand guineas."

"But you don't mean to say you brought *that* away with you?" Bob cried.

"Do you suppose I left it behind?" Lily asked, opening her eyes very wide.

"Why, bless, me, what a clever little soul you are," he said, with a laugh. "Who's that? Oh! is it you, colonel? Come in, sir."

"I say, colonel," he said, after a while, "did you

not tell me that you made some arrangement with Mr. Ray as to his daughter's belongings?"

"Certainly—he signed a paper, giving up all claim to any personal property, money, or jewelry, she may have taken away with her. Why, is there likely to be any trouble?"

Bob burst out laughing. "She has brought all her jewelry with her," he answered; "that is all, but it may make a great difference to us," for he had made a clean breast of his misfortunes to the colonel long before.

Nevertheless, they had hard work to make both ends meet. Bob, at three-and-twenty, and Lily, but seventeen, knew as much about house-keeping as did the babes in the wood, ergo—they were not a little imposed upon. Then, on the other hand, Bob could never allow himself the luxury of a growl, for, as surely as he began, did the tears well up into Mrs. Bob's eyes, and she immediately went in for the luxury of a good cry. Bob, like a good many other men, hated a scene, and tears invariably acted upon him as does a red rag to a bull; so he came to the conclusion that his best plan was to abstain from growling. On that score, matters went rather more smoothly, but there were other scores upon which they persistently declined to go smoothly at all. Lily *would* make a practice of

spooning him. Poor Bob! He had never got over his first feeling that Miss Ray was *unkissable*, and now that she was transformed into Mrs. Bob Sabretasche, he did not find his original opinion altered. But that was not the worst of it. Mrs. Bob made a rule of being more openly demonstrative in public than in private. She liked, poor little soul, to make a display of her affection for her handsome stalwart husband; to sit with her hand in his; to call him by all manner of absurd and endearing names, regardless of the presence of his brother officers, who, one and all, treated him to a volley of nursery names and spoony terms, whenever he ventured to show his face in the ante-room.

“Now, ‘Bobbie-wobbie,’” the first would cry, “come and sit next to me, ‘Duckie-wuckie.’”

Whereupon Bob would shut the door with a crash, and betake himself back to his mismanaged home, to endure the same from Lily, only with the difference that poor little plain Lily was most thoroughly in earnest. Poor Bob; the great change in his life told upon him frightfully—the brightness faded from his eyes; the soldierly, swaggering gait grew quiet and preoccupied, the smartness in his person vanished, and the officers of the Scarlet Lancers one and all agreed that poor old Bob really had gone off woefully.

And then, a new trouble came upon them. In spite of her childish ways, little Mrs. Bob, as they called her, was a great favourite with the whole regiment. Most of them remembered the poor little bruised and swollen wrists, and admired her for the pluck she had shown in cutting the home lot and flying for succour to the man whom she loved. To the officers' wives she was so good-natured and gentle that they, too, admitted her into high favour, and thus it happened that by-and-bye she began to notice the behaviour of other men towards their wives. It was an eventful day for both of them when Mrs. Bob's eyes were thus opened. She perceived that Bob, though long suffering and courteous, never made love to her, and although there are many, many wives who would prize those two desirable qualities before a little love-making and a lot of bullying (is not that the usual mixture?), Mrs. Bob began to pine for that which was denied her. She cared nothing for courtesy, less for long suffering, and she did crave for Bob's love. She one day, in a burst of confidence, said as much to one of the married ladies.

"My dear Mrs. Bob," said she, kindly, "you should never judge one man by another, they show their affection so differently; and, I assure you, Mr. Sabretasche never was of an effusive nature. I never knew him flirt with any one."

But the little woman remained unconvinced, and immediately adopted a new demeanour towards her lord and master. She ceased all the little caresses and endearing terms which had so *worried* him, but which, with the usual contrariety of poor human nature, he somehow missed. He looked at her as she ate her dinner in silence, and wondered if she were "seedy?"

"Oh, Lily, the colonel's coming down to dine to-morrow, there's something on at the theatre, so we'll dinner at seven," he remarked.

"Very well," said Lily, quietly, and without lifting her eyes.

Then, not a little to his astonishment, instead of bringing her dessert plate round to his side, she left the room without speaking. Not that Bob minded that much, but it was rather stupid alone, and an awful bore having to pick his own walnuts; Lily certainly was an indefatigable walnut peeler, there was no doubt about that. Ugh!—he flung the unoffending nut-crackers down with a crash, and broke a plate in so doing, which brought him to himself again.

"Queer thing to go off like that," he mused; "she's such a good-tempered little thing."

It never occurred to him that the trodden worm will turn at last. This poor fragile little worm,

upon whom he had been treading so ruthlessly for months, had turned at last, and Bob did not like it. He felt as if some soft little bird had suddenly repaid his caresses by trying to peck his eyes out. Well! no, he admitted, not *caresses*—he could not shut his eyes to that fact.

However, it was no use sitting looking at that broken plate all night, so he roused himself and went into the drawing-room. His wife was sitting in a huge chair, with a novel in her hand. She never looked up when he entered, and did not, as was her wont, fly to fill his pipe—bless you, no, she did not mind smoking—to give him a light, to fold his paper just where he wanted to read, or to do the hundred-and-one things, in the doing of which she had made a veritable slave of herself. Bob felt himself personally aggrieved. No sooner was he settled in his chair than he discovered that his tobacco-pot was missing.

“Do you know where my tobacco is, Lily?”

“I believe it’s on the dining-room chimney-piece,” she answered, indifferently.

Bob fetched it with a groan—an inward one. Then he filled his pipe, but a lighter or a match there was not. He had not a scrap of paper or a fusee about him, and at last he flung the offending pipe into the fire.

“I say, Lily.”

“M—m?” said Lily, reading on.

“Have you a head-ache?”

“Oh, no.”

A moment later the book shared a similar fate to the pipe, being unceremoniously banged under a sofa.

“Then what is the matter?” Bob asked. “Why did you go off without any dessert?”

“I went off,” said the little woman, bravely, “because you did not want me. I don’t like making myself too cheap, and I’ve done a great deal too much in that way lately.”

Bob stood irresolute. He had schooled himself so carefully in the belief that he did not want her, that he felt it would be like telling a lie to say otherwise, and yet, the prospect of peeling his own walnuts, of filling his own pipe—in fact, of doing the hundred-and-one things that Lily had regularly done for him, was absolutely appalling—therefore he compromised matters by saying,

“I never said so.”

“Not in words,” retorted Lily, significantly.

“What do you mean, child?”

“Just what I say!” she cried, with hysterical passion. “You don’t want me, though you swore to love me—to love and to cherish me. Yes; I

suppose you married me for pity, for you don't really want me, and I wish I was dead!"

Bob Sabretasche was not a very clever young man, and it dawned upon him that he had really trodden upon that meek little worm very unmercifully. As always happened when he was in a dilemma, a vision of the kindly, handsome face of his dead father rose before him, and the frank voice rang through his ears: "Never play a woman false, Bob; it's a wrong once done that you never get over as long as you live; a remembrance of that kind comes back to you, long after you'd fain forget all about it."

"I wish I was dead," Mrs. Bob went on, tearfully, and so, I dare say, do you."

"I do not," he cried.

"But since I am not"—with a great sigh—"I think I will go away. Perhaps *they*"—she always spoke of her people thus—"perhaps *they* will take me in again."

The handsome old face vanished, and in its place came a vision of himself as he would be in the long years of the future—*alone*, growing middle-aged and old—*and alone*.

"Don't speak like that, Lily," he cried, taking her in his arms, "I cannot bear to hear you."

"But you don't want me, I *know* you don't."

“On my word, I do.”

She had taken his word before—she took it again.

And, after all, when old Ray died, they came in for something like a million of money, and they did not have to wait so very long for it either.



A SATANIC A.D.C.

LUCY MOORE was cook in the family of a well-to-do professional man in the old city of Liliminster, and, to use her mistress's words, was a perfect treasure. In these days perfect treasures are very bad to 'meet with in any class of life, but most of all in the kitchen; a fact of which Mrs. Johnson was very well aware, and for that reason took great care of Lucy and did everything she could to make her satisfied with her place.

Many people maintain that servants are what the mistresses make them, so perhaps Mrs. Johnson's own disposition may have had something to do with the excellence of Lucy's. Never had a girl so kind and good a mistress—so Lucy said; and never had any mistress a better servant—so Mrs. Johnson said. Her kitchen was always the very picture of neatness—the dish-covers and pans shone like burnished silver in the sunshine, the range was never dull, the oven was always clean when required—a little circumstance most housekeepers understand the value of. And best of all, was the appearance

of Lucy herself. Her plentiful brown hair was always smoothly brushed and coiled into a neat knot at the back of her head, she had a bright intelligent face with soft grey eyes, good teeth, a white throat, and *invariably* a clean collar. Small wonder was it, therefore, that Mrs. Johnson was for ever haunted by a great fear, lest some unprincipled young man should discover Lucy's charms and carry her off in triumph—still, as Lucy was turned three-and-twenty and seemed bad to please, she was not without hopes that the evil day might yet be put off for an indefinite period.

But Mrs. Johnson had reckoned without her host, for one fine morning, when she went as usual into the kitchen, Lucy took her breath away by expressing in the much-dreaded formula, that she “should like to leave this day month, m'm.”

“To leave!” the poor lady gasped; “why, Lucy, what is the matter?”

“Well, m’,” returned Lucy, with a blush, “it isn’t that anything’s the matter, but—I’m going to be married.”

“Married,” with a great sigh; “well, Lucy, I am glad for your happiness, but, oh dear, what *shall* I do without you?”

“Oh! there’s plenty more to get, m’,” said Lucy, with a pleased blush, “and it’s such a good place, you are sure to get suited.”

“Well, we must hope so,” returned Mrs. Johnson, not very hopefully. “And so you are going to be married, Lucy? I hope you have made a careful choice—marriage is a serious business.”

“Yes, m’, but he is a very steady young man,” Lucy answered, proudly.

“And what is he?—what is his name, Lucy?”

“His name is Jinks, m’. Yes, m’, Henry Jinks, and he’s a soldier.”

“A *soldier*—oh, Lucy!” Mrs. Johnson almost screamed. “Oh, I am sorry—I am sorry!”

“There’s no call for that, m’, *I’m* sure,” said Lucy, in an offended tone, “he’s a very fine young man.”

“But, my poor girl, you don’t know the life you have before you,” cried the mistress—being old-fashioned, and classing all soldiers as “bad in a lump”—“you don’t indeed. A soldier has some four-pence-half-penny a day, when his expenses are paid, and how can you live on that?—after being accustomed to a good table, too. Why, even if you can get put on the strength of the regiment, you will only have one room—perhaps not that—and seventeen dirty soldiers to wash for.”

“Well, m’,” Lucy answered, “I never saw a dirty soldier yet, and I fancy if one was to keep himself dirty he would very soon get himself into trouble ;

and as to washing for them, I'm not going to do that. He's got leave to be married, but I'm going to live as cook with Mrs. Sabretasche, one of the officers' ladies. My young man is servant to Mr. Sabretasche and lives in the house, and so as Mrs. Sabretasche has had a deal of trouble with her servants, being a very young lady, I'm going to be cook-housekeeper for her."

"And how will you do, if you've half-a-dozen babies?" the mistress asked.

"Why, m', Mrs. Sabretasche says she'll risk that," Lucy answered, with another blush.

And so in due time Lucy Moore was transformed into Lucy Jinks, and took up her abode in the Sabretasches' domicile. Everyone was benefited by the change excepting Mrs. Johnson, who got an idle, dirty, incompetent person in Lucy's place, and never ceased bewailing the loss of her perfect treasure. On the very first evening of Lucy's rule Bob Sabretasche had a dinner as well-cooked as he could have got at the mess, and his satisfaction reflected itself upon Mrs. Bob. Not that she cared much about cooking, but it was nice to see Bob pleased.

"Tell your wife, Jinks," said Bob, when the dessert was placed on the table, "that I've the very highest respect for her—she's a very clever woman." And

so Mr. and Mrs. Jinks were pleased also, for everyone likes well-merited praise.

“It’s a great piece of good luck, Lily,” said Bob, when Jinks had departed; “we must take care of them both, for Jinks is a clever servant, and a woman who can cook like that is not to be met with every day.”

“No, it is a comfort,” Lily answered.

For a few months this delightful state of things continued. Lucy was a careful, conscientious manager, and made everyone around her comfortable, Jinks was as happy as a man could be, and the Sabretasches positively revelled in little dinner parties, when all at once there came a change. Not in the cooking and not in the housework, that was as well done as ever. No; the change was in Lucy herself. She all at once grew nervous, listless, almost sullen. Her hair was rough, her collar awry, and she complained perpetually of headache. Jinks was beside himself and forgot half the duties he had to perform, for which Lucy rated him soundly, reducing him thereby almost to tears. Mrs. Bob told Bob she was very uneasy about Lucy; and Bob, who had noticed the change in her personal appearance, asked the doctor to step in and look at her.

The doctor did step in, and immediately asked if she had anything on her mind?

Lucy looked nervously round and stammered, "No, sir," whereupon he promised to send her a little soothing medicine.

In due time the medicine arrived and Lucy took it—she also took some wine, which Bob sent down for her; but neither medicine nor wine had the slightest effect upon her nerves, and after a few days she confided to Mrs. Bob that she must leave the house.

"Leave!" Mrs. Bob echoed, blankly. "Oh! Lucy, why?"

"I never!" exclaimed Jinks, the plate in his hand falling to the ground in his consternation.

"The devil!" ejaculated Bob, aghast.

"Ah-h-h-h!" shrieked Lucy in terror, then sank down upon the nearest chair and, covering her head with her apron, burst into a torrent of tears.

It was an unusual and impressive scene. Mrs. Bob sat in her chair weak and trembling, she was just then in delicate health, as Bob remembered; Bob himself stood staring at her, and Jinks—very white and open-mouthed—held on by the end of the sideboard, looking alternately from his wife to the broken fragments of the plate lying at his feet. At the door stood the scared house-maid, having been attracted by Lucy's prolonged scream, and in the midst sat Lucy herself, sobbing and shudder-

ing and, after the manner of her class, swaying to and fro, as if in the most dire agony of mind and body.

“Now come, tell us all about it,” said Bob, persuasively.

“I dare not stay, sir,” Lucy sobbed.

“But why? Jinks hasn’t been ill-using you, surely?”

“Why, Jinks isn’t that fond—” muttered the owner of the name, under his breath.

“Well, what is it, Lucy,” Bob urged, “if it’s not Jinks?”

“Oh! sir, he’s as good and kind,” Lucy said between her sobs, “as a man can be, and I’m that fond of him, it would break my heart to part from him. And I like Sarah—we never have no disagreeables in the kitchen at all. I like you all, sir, and I thinks a deal of mistress, I do—but I dare not stay. I’m not safe in this house, and I must get away somewhere.”

“Has any one been annoying you?” Bob asked. “By Jove! I’ll break his head for him.”

“Me too,” put in Jinks, stolidly.

“Not safe,” Mrs. Bob repeated, incredulously, while Sarah scurried in and shut the door; “why, Lucy, who can do you any harm here?”

“I’ll tell you all about it m’,” said Lucy, wiping her eyes with her apron. “You know I always

gets up early, for master's breakfast must be had punctual."

"Yes, I'm sure you do, Lucy," Mrs. Bob answered. "You know, dear, when Jane was here, you *often* had to go without your breakfast and get something to eat in the mess."

"Yes. Well, go on, Lucy," said the master.

"When I awoke on Monday morning—a week yesterday as was—it was nearly half-past seven, and I hurried to get down, thinking of master's breakfast, you know, m'. Thinks I—I shall have to run to get it in in time, but, if you'll believe me, sir, when I went into the kitchen all was done. The floor had been fresh washed, the grate black-leaded, the fire was burning—a big fire, too, it was, such as I never keeps—the kettle was filled and hanging on the bar, even the plates and cups that you'd had on Sunday night was all washed and put away. All was done—the steps had been washed, the hall swept out, and it's been just the same ever since. I went up to see if Sarah had been helping me, which I thought was queer, as in general she isn't a very good getter-up; but there she was in bed, sound asleep, just as I'd left Jinks. Oh! I must go," she ended, with a fresh burst of tears, "I must go, for I'm not safe here."

“But Lucy,” said Bob, at last, “why are you not safe?—who do you think has done’ all this?”

Lucy looked cautiously round, puckered up her apron into a thousand creases, glanced furtively at her husband and Bob, then at her mistress sitting astonished and tired and finally said, in a frightened whisper, “I think it’s *the devil!*”

As I am writing a true story, I must confess that at this point the four persons who had been listening breathlessly to Lucy’s tale began to laugh, not merely did they begin, but they continued—they laughed until they were obliged to sit down and cry with the effort, while Lucy, thinking the whole world—nay, two whole worlds—were against her, once more threw her apron over her head, and absolutely wailed aloud in her terror and dismay.

“Now come, Lucy,” said Bob, still struggling with his laughter, “go down and get your breakfast, whilst we think over this business.”

“But supposing he should really come, sir,” Lucy protested, “and I should see him—tail and hoof and all. Oh! I don’t know what I should do.”

“Jinks or Sarah will stay with you,” he said, soothingly, “and you know, he never shows himself to more than one person at once.”

“But perhaps he’ll come in the morning and carry me off.”

“Oh! nonsense, Jinks and I will sit up to-night and watch for him, and if a loaded revolver does not settle him, we must call in the police. Now go and get your breakfast. Mrs. Sabretasche is quite upset by all this.”

The two women left the room, and Jinks followed more slowly, looking thoroughly mystified.

“A Satanic A.D.C., eh, Jinks?” remarked Bob Sabretasche, cheerfully.

“The very rummest go as ever I ’erd on, sir,” Jinks replied, as he closed the door.

“Well, it really *is* odd, Bob,” said his wife, in a puzzled tone; “now isn’t it?”

“Very. I say, Lily, all this has upset you. Of course, Lucy’s a very clever cook and all that, but it’s very tiresome of her to have her heroics just now. She must be rather touched in the upper story.”

“Well, do you know, I always thought her a remarkably sensible young woman,” Lily answered, gravely. “However, to-night, you and Jinks will see what you will see. What a bore, though, sitting up. I wish, Bob, you would let me sit up, too.”

“Certainly not,” he replied, with much decision. He did, however, let her sit up an hour later than usual—partly because she was excited and wakeful,

and partly because he looked forward to the long night's vigil with not a little disgust. He had many and many a time sat up all night in his bachelor days, gone to bed at cock-crow to snatch an hour's feverish sleep, and tumble up cross and heavy to his duty; that was all very well, but to spend the long hours of the night in a silent house, with only a book and a pipe to keep him awake, was a decided nuisance.

"I knew it was too good to last," he said, thinking of Lucy's little dinners. "Jinks," he said, when the others had gone to bed, "go into the dining-room and pile up a good fire; I will do the same here—and remember, whatever happens, the women are not to be frightened."

Jinks obeyed, and in a very few minutes the house was as silent as the grave.

One—Two—Three—Four.

"This is becoming tiresome," Bob yawned, rousing himself out of his chair, with a great stretching of his long limbs. "Hollo! what's that?"

"That" was the opening of the door above, followed by the sound of a footfall on the stairs—not a quick, light tread, but slow and somewhat shuffling. He strode to the door, just in time to see Jinks appear at the opposite one, poker in hand, and, looking up the stairs, he saw Lucy herself de-

scending them, her eyes set in the fixed glassy stare of a somnambulist. He stepped lightly across the hall, seeing that Jinks was about to speak.

“Not a word, for heaven’s sake!” he whispered. The figure in her long loose night-dress passed more swiftly by them, and the young man caught Jinks by the arm, perceiving that he was trembling and had grown ghastly pale. “Don’t you see that she is walking in her sleep?” he whispered.

“Lord! sir,” returned Jinks, prosaically, “blest if I knew what to think, except she’d gone out of her mind.”

They watched her, in silence, for nearly an hour, whilst swiftly and with wonderfully little noise she performed all her morning’s duties—then she went as quietly back to bed again, and in two minutes was sleeping as peacefully as a tiny child.

“Now then, Jinks, the quicker we get to bed the better,” said Bob, with a shiver and a yawn, then thanked his stars that it was his cook and not his wife who had a fancy for roaming about the house in her night-dress during the small hours of the morning.

“And so you see, Lucy,” he said, with a laugh, a few hours later, “it wasn’t such a very bad devil after all.”

“I don’t know for that, sir,” Lucy retorted

brightly—she had taken the teasing very pleasantly —“most of us finds ourselves quite bad enough to manage. Jinks tells me that A.D.C. means an officer who helps the general, and I think most of us might apply for that post to him, as I thought it was.”

“You are right there, Lucy,” said Bob, in answer to this somewhat incoherent statement.

He looked across the table at Lily’s wan face, which of late had seemed all eyes, and thanked God that he had sent in his resignation of that not too creditable post before it was too late. He kissed her very kindly before he went out, even more kindly than usual.

“We must tell Jinks to lock the door for the future,” he said. “I cannot have you worried, for you have grown very precious to me.”

“How is that?” she asked, with a flush of intense pleasure.

“Because Lily, my child, you have taught me that I can get surer and better promotion than as A.D.C. to his Satanic Majesty,” Bob answered, gravely.

“Kiss me,” said the girl, simply.

SERGEANT THE HONOURABLE HUGH BRABAZON.

CHAPTER I.

THE HONOURABLE HUGH BRABAZON had come to the end of his tether, and, as most people know, that is a remarkably unpleasant position. I was going to say that most people know it from experience, but as it is not very long since I myself did feel such a thrill of indignation from a similar supposition, I will refrain from inflicting the like upon any one else. Yes! I went to a military temperance meeting—a kind of mission from soldiers to civilians—but I cannot say that I went as a sympathizer. I heard very bad speeches, shocking singing, and I think the very worst pianoforte solo I was ever condemned to listen to. Assuredly I did not go to hear any of those things. I went to hear the band, which was an exceptionally fine one, but I was none the less disgusted when the quarter-master got up and told us, he was quite sure we all knew, *from experience*, that “drunken joy brings sober sorrow.” If *he* had “touched pitch” and seen the error of his ways, it was rather too bad to cry

out that the whole world was—or had been—as be-daubed as himself. However, we have been leaving the Honourable Hugh to be what the stock-brokers call a “lay-bye,” and must return to him without further ado.

In the first place, Hugh Brabazon was a younger son of a very noble and mighty house. He was fair to look upon, exceedingly so, standing over six feet in his socks, and being well-built, active, and very graceful; he had merry blue eyes, well-cut aquiline features, and chesnut hair, which grew in little short curls all over his head.

He had come of a race accustomed for many generations to be extravagant, and the family trait was not less marked in Hugh than it had been in any of his ancestors. He was extravagant, with a generous open-handedness which might have been all very well if his purse had been proportionately long and, in fact, inexhaustible; but, unfortunately, such was not the case: he tried the experiment of running a race between his inclination and his purse, and, as generally happens, the latter got the worst of it and made a bad second. What was still more deplorable, Hugh's tether pulled up with a jerk so sharp, that, as the most expeditious way of settling matters, he left his “engagements” to arrange themselves, and—’listed for a soldier.

Taking all things into consideration, it was an utterly idiotic move to make; for if the House of Brabazon had not much money, it had considerable influence, and in a little time he might have been pushed into something, or he might have married some wealthy young lady hailing from the City, who would gladly have given her thousands for the sake of obtaining those six magic letters, "Hon. and Mrs.," before her name. However, Hugh did not give the House the opportunity of exerting the influence it undoubtedly possessed, but brought his affairs to a climax by pushing himself into the Scarlet Lancers as Private Hugh Brown.

Of course, the officers saw at once that he was a gentleman, though the truth concerning him did not creep out for some time; therefore, they put him into B-troop, commonly known amongst the men as "the gentlemen's troop."

There he found his old chum, Bertie Le Mesurier, in all the dignity of a lance-corporalship. The sergeant-major was a scion of one of the oldest north-country families and an M.A. of Oxford to boot. There was the son of a major-general; the son of a high dignitary of the Church; the son of a major, and Teddy Lloyd, who had been at Eton with Hugh ten years before.

As he recognized one after another he laughed,

and declared the new life would be glorious fun. Poor Hugh! He did not laugh very long!—he had to grow accustomed to a good many things before he learned to laugh again in the old, gay, light-hearted fashion; for, when the novelty of his surroundings had worn off, he was supremely miserable.

He was always forgetting!—that was his great stumbling block. He meant well, but remembering was such hard work. When he met Joey Parsons, who had fagged for him at Eton—a little snub-nosed imp, whom he had bullied and thrashed, and now had to salute—well, it was hard work. Not that Hugh cared a fig for the actual fact of saluting, not a bit of it. He was Lord Brabazon's son—a scion of one of the oldest and proudest families in the kingdom, and his position—his birth that is—was unalterable. He knew that nothing could make Parsons *père* anything but a brewer, with no claims to any other distinction than the possession and pride of a certain income. Besides, Hugh had the old *noblesse oblige* feeling very strong in him; he was Private Hugh Brown, No. 842—worse luck—and Joey was Sub-Lieutenant Parsons, and must therefore be respected as such. No! it was not that at all that bothered him; but when he met Joey,

dressed like a tailor's advertisement, strutting into the town, with a cigar in his mouth, and the most perfect unconsciousness that the man who passed him was anything but one of the "men," was in fact Hugh Brabazon, who had thrashed him dozens of times, his inclination to give him a dig in the ribs and shout "Hallo, Joey!" was at times almost too strong for him; and usually, the nearly-forgotten salute was so hurried that, had not Joey himself been taken up with the novelty of *his* surroundings, and so full of his own importance, he might have recommended Sergeant-Major Green, M.A., to see that Private Brown, No. 842, was properly instructed in the manner of saluting his officers when out of barracks.

And then there was the food! Hugh really did not know whether, taking the life all round, the food was not the most trying part of the whole business. It might be wholesome, he confided to Bertie Le Mesurier, but oh! dash it, it was unpalatable. The restriction, the work, the horrible drill, drill, drill, the more horrible uniform, in which he was so uncomfortable and felt such a long-legged idiot, the most horrible riding-school, and the lack of a corner he could call his own, were all very bad, undeniably bad things, but he didn't know that the food was not the worst. The bare table, the tin plates, the coarse

food, and the three-pronged steel forks—oh! how he did prick his unfortunate mouth, until at last he went in desperation to the town and bought himself a silver spoon, knife and fork, with a case to keep them in. As he said, with grim humour, he had stood god-father to Private Brown, and was bound to come down with a christening gift.

Just at first it did not ooze out in the regiment who Private Brown, No. 842, was when at home. Those in B-troop who knew him were gentlemen, and respected his *incognito*, as he did theirs. But “murder will out,” and before many months had elapsed, the secret of his real name was generally known. It came out in this wise. It happened that Sub-Lieutenant Parsons desired to change his servant. It occurred to him that Private Brown was an exceptionally clean, smart-looking fellow, and he intimated that he should be glad to select him for that purpose. I am bound to say that Hugh immediately went off into the most agonizing paroxysm of laughter that ever embarrassed a private or ruffled an officer’s dignity—Sub-Lieutenant Parsons’s dignity was undeniably ruffled.

“What the devil do you mean, sir?” he demanded.

For a moment Private Brown struggled against it, but it was of no use, the laughter broke out again, in a more exhausting burst than before.

The little officer looked up at the big private in utter astonishment: this was a breach of discipline too awful to realize, but, as he looked more closely, a gleam of recognition came into his short-sighted, boiled-gooseberry looking eyes.

“I have seen you somewhere before—where?” he he asked, authoritatively.

The laughter bubbled up to Hugh’s lips again, but in moderation this time.

“It would be rather turning the tables, if I became fag for you, Joey,” he said, with good-natured contempt. “Excuse the familiarity, sir, but one is apt to forget sometimes that you are anyone but that young limb of evil, Joey Parsons, and I anyone but Hugh Brabazon.”

“Hugh Brabazon!” Joey repeated, “and in the Scarlet Lancers!—I must have been blind!”

“I often thought so,” Hugh said, easily. “Well, sir—Lord, fancy my saying ‘sir’ to you!—I am very much flattered that you would care to have me for your servant, but——”

“No, no, of course not,” said Joey, hastily, and resuming his official tone. “Well, Brabazon, I’m awfully sorry that you’ve come down to this, the life must be an awful change for you, and if I can do anything to brighten it, you may count on me, for the sake of old times.”

“Thank you, sir,” answered Hugh, simply.

He saluted him as usual, as he walked away, but stood watching the small receding form with a huge scorn on his mouth and in his handsome eyes.

“What is it, Hugh?” said Bertie Le Mesurier.

The scorn changed into a sigh. “A new sensation, Bertie,” he said, with a short laugh. “Ah! I wish I could go back to the old ones, when I didn’t have a brewer’s snobbish son inviting me to clean his boots and brush his clothes for him.”

“Did he do that?”

“Yes; did me the honour to wish me for his servant.”

“What did you say?”

“Say? I didn’t say anything; I just roared.”

“Laughed?” Bertie echoed.

“I should think I did,” laughing again at the remembrance. “I believe he thought of putting me under arrest, only he didn’t.”

“I wouldn’t do that again, though, Hugh. Ridiculing your officers is a serious thing; besides, he may make life very much more unpleasant for you in many ways, if he thinks fit.”

“But he won’t,” returned Hugh, confidently, “he won’t. You are heir to a baronetcy and I am Lord Brabazon’s son, so we are both sure of Joey Parsons’s ‘civility.’”

“My good chap, I am Corporal Black and you are Private Brown,” he expostulated.

“He knows us both, take my word for it,” Hugh laughed. “Moreover, he wants to marry one of my sisters, who won’t look at him. I never met him after I left Eton, but I heard all about it from the girls: they used to make awful game of him.”

The danger-signals mounted up to Bertie’s face, and he asked, with a great assumption of carelessness, which sister the little cock-sparrow was after?

“Gwen,” Hugh replied. “Yes! it was Gwen, who—oh! hang it, Bertie, she hasn’t forgotten the old days, any more than you or I have.”

“Bertram Black, lance-corporal of the Scarlet Lancers,” said Bertie, in a hopeless voice, “and she is the Honourable Gwendolin Brabazon, one of the most beautiful women in England.”

“With a heart to match her face, bless her,” cried Hugh. “She won’t forget the heir of the Le Mesuriers for a low little scrub of a Cockney brewer.”

“I wished I dared think so,” Bertie returned, wistfully.

“Well, now look here, old man: Gwen’s the only one of the lot who has stuck to me through thick and thin. Eva’s not so plucky as Gwen, and she is the only one who knows where I am. I send

my letters through her maid, and Gwen writes to me every week regularly. I heard from her this morning. If you care to see her letter you can, she won't mind."

"Care!" Bertie repeated.

"Yes, I see you do. You will see what she says about you, and, since she has sent me two photographs exactly alike, she must have meant me to give one to you. You can take your choice."

He handed him the dainty, perfumed letter and left him—glad of his friend's pleasure, but with a sigh on his lips, a dull pain in his heart, an utter sense of weariness and restless impatience with everything around him, and a vision before him of a fairy figure, most often clad in scarlet and white garments, of two soft brown eyes looking into his own, of two red-ripe lips upraised to his, of the feeling of two rounded white arms about his throat, and a soft voice whispering, "I love you."

He folded his arms upon the railing of the verandah, and gazed through the December gloom across the scarcely visible rows of barrack buildings to the twinkling lights of Liliminster, two miles away, and, as he leant there alone, an exceedingly bitter cry rose to his lips.

“Oh, Nell, Nell, Nell! If I could only bring the old days back again. Oh, Nell!”

All was quiet around him! There was an occasional clatter of spurred feet on the corridor behind him; a bad piano went “ting-ting-tum-tum” in the officers’ quarters; there was, now and then, a sound of laughter from the next block, where the married people lived, and he could hear the measured tramp of the various sentries. Still, the great deserted square was quiet, and Hugh Brabazon leant on the railing, gazing across it into vacancy—vacancy as utterly blank and empty as his troubled heart.

A shower had fallen during the afternoon, and it might be that the raindrops were still hanging from the roof of the verandah, and so had fallen upon his uncovered head and down his face upon his clasped hands; and yet surely the rain-drops would not have been warm; warm?—the drops which fell upon Hugh Brabazon’s hands were scalding hot. Poor Hugh! He had got over the roughest part of the new life, but the little glimpse of the old, which had come to him in his conversation with his whilom fag, Joey Parsons, and with his sister’s lover, Bertie Le Mesurier, had been more bitter to him than all the changes he had yet undergone, and most bitter of all was the

fierce yearning which rising in his heart had forced that passionate cry from his quivering lips—"Oh, Nell, Nell, Nell!"

CHAPTER II.

Two years had passed away, and Hugh Brabazon was still in the Scarlet Lancers, not as private, but as Sergeant Brown.

During that period of time many changes had taken place in the regiment. Sergeant-Major Green, M.A., had resumed his own honourable name as a commissioned officer, and his place had been taken by the son of the major-general, who, if wild, was a first-rate soldier. Bertie Le Mesurier had gone back to society, as Sir Bertram, some months before the brilliant August days on which I take up the threads of my story; and if there was no Gwen Brabazon down in the old Devonshire house, there was an Honourable Lady Le Mesurier to be found at a certain Elizabethan mansion, styled Rest Court, who bore a strong resemblance to that very beautiful young lady, and who frequently wrote to Hugh as "your very loving sister." The son of the "dignitary" was doing as well as might reasonably be expected, considering his training, which must have been on the principle of "the shoe-

maker's missis going the worst shod." Teddie Lloyd they had left behind them at Liliminster, in his quiet grave, and Hugh was advanced to the dignity of sergeant. Such were some of the changes which two years had wrought in the "gentlemen's troop" of the Scarlet Lancers.

It was a blazing August afternoon—most people know what that means, but happily for them, only a limited portion of the community know what it means when the words *at Aldershot* are placed after it. The sun literally poured down, it teemed, it shone cats and dogs, if one may be allowed the expression; and every living thing in Aldershot was probably nearer to sunstroke and heat apoplexy than he or she had ever been in his or her life. Reader, have you ever been to Aldershot? Do you know the bare, bleak, shelterless combination of flints and grit of which Aldershot is composed? For my part, I think Burns was rather out of it when he described his farm as the "riddlings o' creation," he could never have seen Aldershot. I never knew a soldier yet who did not hate it, and it has often been a source of marvel to me to determine how it is that any one can live there from choice, and there certainly are people who do so.

The Scarlet Lancers were in barracks—not camp—and on that particular afternoon Sergeant Hugh Brown

was very busy helping Sergeant-Major Todd—otherwise Geoffrey, eldest son of Major-General Colquhoun, V.C., C.B.—to do nothing. Each was in possession of a door-post of the sergeants' mess, that being the only spot where anything approaching to a draught of air was obtainable. Within the long room various bundles of scarlet and gold lace were lying about in more or less advanced stages of the two complaints I have just mentioned, which, as the heat of the day wore off, might end in nothing, or in the hospital and the "Dead March in Saul."

"Awfully hot," murmured Hugh, sending out great clouds of smoke from a well-coloured meerschaum, and thereby making himself very much hotter.

"Beastly hole, Aldershot," returned the other; "and I'll be shot if there are not some tourists coming to look round. Fancy any one sufficiently idiotic to come to Aldershot for a 'hairing!' Why, town must be cool to this."

Hugh turned his head in the direction his friend had indicated.

"Mr. Sabretasche," he exclaimed, in disgusted tones; "Mr. Sabretasche *and* ladies. Hi! you fellows," putting his head inside the room; "here's Mr. Sabretasche bringing some ladies round the barracks."

The several bundles of scarlet and gold, struggled

up from their various recumbent attitudes, and there was a general buttoning of jackets and straightening of ruffled locks.

“Mr. Sabretasche might know better, on a day like this,” one growled, with a great sigh, as the last button slipped into its place.

Hugh took no notice—he was too lazy, and the weather was too sultry to admit of argument with any one. He straightened himself once more against the door-post, and thanked Heaven it was Mr. Sabretasche and not himself who was making the round of the barracks.

“Can we come in, Sergeant Brown?” said Mr. Sabretasche, at his elbow.

“Certainly, sir,” Hugh answered, with a bow for the little lady, who never would, under any circumstances, pass him without recognition, and who persisted in calling him “Mr.—*Brown*.”

“Good day, ma’am.”

“Good afternoon, Mr.—*Brown*,” she returned, “is it not warm? Too warm for sight-seeing, is it not? But we have a lady staying with us, who has never been in a barrack in her life, so we braved the heat.”

Hugh was about to make some courteous rejoinder, when he looked past Mrs. Sabretasche at the face of her visitor, visible for the first time, since, as yet, she had carried a large white sunshade. For one moment

his heart seemed to stand still—then it went hurrying on again in such fierce throbs that his brain was in a whirl, and he felt as if he must fall. By a mighty effort he controlled himself, and bent courteously down to the little wife of his officer.

“It is very hot! Will you not rest here awhile, ma’am?” he said.

If he desired and intended to meet Mrs. Sabretasche’s guest without recognition and as a stranger, she did not fall in with his views. On the contrary, she went a step nearer to him, and laid her two little hands on the gold embroidery of his sleeve.

“Oh, Hugh!” she said, in a piteous voice.

Sergeant Brown moved a step away from her, and the little hands fell to her side again.

“Why, Nell!” cried Mrs. Sabretasche, in surprise.

“What are you doing here?” the girl called Nell asked, blankly.

“This is the sergeants’ mess, ma’am,” Hugh replied, coldly; “and I being a sergeant—Sergeant Brown, at your service—live here.”

“You—live—*here*?” the girl echoed. She looked around her with eyes which saw no comfort, no beauty in the room, which was, in truth, both comfortable and pretty. She took in every detail: the long table with its green cover, the prints, and one or two water-colours on the walls, the pair of silver

cups, the various presents given by sergeants who had left, either as officers, or to go back to their own position, at the vase of flowers on the side table—it was really a very pretty room, but she saw in it only misery, discomfort, and ugliness, and elevated a nose already inclined that way by nature. “You, Hugh Brabazon—*live*—here?” she repeated.

“Sergeant Brown, if you please, ma’am,” Hugh said, by way of correction.

“Don’t tell me,” she cried, imperatively. “Do you think I do not know you?”

“It would be more kind, then, to pass me,” he said in a low voice.

“I will not pass you. What have I done that I should not speak to you?”

“It is what I have done,” he answered.

At this point, Mrs. Sabretasche betook herself into the billiard room, whither her husband and the other members of the sergeants’ mess had gone. Nell, perceiving that they were now alone, put her hands on Hugh’s arm again, and, as the wall was behind him, he could not escape; in fact, the tall man was at the little woman’s mercy.

“What have you done?” she asked—then in sudden alarm, “not got married, surely, Hugh?”

“Married,” he repeated, scornfully, “to whom?”

“Oh! well, I didn’t know. One never knows what may or may not have happened. I can’t say I should have been surprised, after the horrid way you treated me.”

“Nell!” he said, reproachfully.

“Oh, you may say ‘Nell!’ as hard as you like.” She laughed—a suspicious laugh it was, for there was a sound of tears in it, and there were glistening drops in her soft eyes. “Pray, since we cannot stay talking much longer in a sergeants’ mess, are you coming to call upon me whilst I am with the Sabretasches?”

“My dear child—I am Sergeant Brown, and your host is Lieutenant Sabretasche,” he answered. “Do be reasonable—it is not likely I can be on visiting terms with them.”

“Cannot you come for once as Hugh Brabazon?” she asked.

“It is impossible. Here I am only Sergeant Brown.”

Just then Bob Sabretasche came out of the billiard room, followed by his wife.

“Brabazon,” he said, simply, “will you come to my house, as soon as you can this evening?”

Hugh looked down upon his uniform and hesitated.

“Never mind that, I’ll send Jinks out,” said

Bob; "I'm sure you and Lady Helen are dying to—to—talk old times over."

"I am, I frankly admit it," said Lady Helen, with saucy coolness; "but my opinion is that Mr. Brabazon wishes to shirk the acquaintance."

"Yes, do come," supplemented Mrs. Bob, "and I will show you my babies."

"Come and show me the rest of the barracks," said Helen, in a whisper so coaxing that Hugh hardly knew whether he was standing on his head or his feet. "Do come, Hugh; don't be nasty. Yes, Mr. Sabretasche, he will come this evening; and, in the meantime, he is going to show off the rest of the barracks to me."

"Very well—come, Lily, let us go on in front," Bob answered, with a laugh.

As the two figures passed the windows, Sergeant-Major Todd and another sergeant went to the door and watched them out of sight—the tall man in scarlet and gold, and the little woman in scarlet and white.

"She's a deuced pretty girl," Todd remarked; "I wonder who she is. Seems to have her own way with Hugh."

"She is Lady Helen Fairfax," Smith answered.

"Oh, you know her?"

"Yes! She didn't see me, though. Yes, I know

her: my sister married her cousin, the earl. Lady Helen was engaged to Brabazon ever so long ago."

"Then you are Harry Tyrrwitt—how well you've kept your secret."

"Yes," with a laugh; "but don't let it go any further."

"Oh, no. So that is Lady Helen Fairfax, is it? I've often heard of her. I didn't know old Hugh was spoons on her. How was it they did not marry at first?"

"Hugh got into debt and other difficulties, gave her freedom by letter—and bolted. I didn't know she cared for him still, or I might have let her know his whereabouts long since—however, I suppose it will be all right now."

But later, when Hugh turned up again, he did not look at all as if it was all right; of a truth, he was most woefully puzzled. Little Nell, whom he loved so, had crossed his path once more, and would not be treated as a stranger. Poor dear little Nell, who had no money, and ought to marry a duke at least. The delight of seeing her was still visible in his brightened eyes and in the tender smile upon his lips, still with him in the passionate throbbing of his heart; and yet—what was he to do? He was Sergeant Brown and she was an earl's daughter, as poor as she was proud and

lovely. Even if he left the army, they could not live upon air.

He spoke to no one, being like a man asleep. Nor did he rouse out of his reverie until he found himself in Mrs. Sabretasche's drawing room, admiring the younger of her two babies, and—as his quickly beating pulses told him—once more near Nell Fairfax.

Bob was not in the room. Mrs. Sabretasche went the length of weaving a polite fiction about an important letter, at which Lady Helen had the audacity to laugh aloud.

“We expected you to dinner, Mr. Brabazon,” said little Mrs. Bob, when the baby-worship was brought to a close.

“Oh! you are very kind,” Hugh answered, “but I couldn't very well come to dinner.”

“Why not?” Nell asked.

“My uniform,” he began.

“Oh! we sent Jinks and his wife to the theatre,” Mrs. Bob laughed, “and the other two servants brought the dinner in for us. We did capitally, did we not, Nell?”

“Yes, all but the visitor.”

“Well, I must take this little lady up to the nursery. Will you excuse me for a few moments, Mr. Brabazon?”

“Certainly!” He opened the door for her, and Nell, watching him, thought that, although he could not have seen much of ladies during the past three years, he had lost none of the courtly grace for which the Brabazons had ever been distinguished.

“Now,” she said, as the door closed and he came back to the window, “what have you to say to me?”

“I don’t know what to say,” he answered, drawing her to him and looking down into her clear eyes. “I think, Nell, you are making it harder for both of us.”

“Do you know,” she asked, gravely, “what I think of you?”

“No, how should I?”

“I think, when you went off as you did, that you behaved abominably. Yes, Mr. Hugh Brabazon, disgracefully, and now you are going to do penance for your sins. You are, in fact, going to marry me.”

“My darling, we cannot live upon nothing,” he expostulated. “You cannot live in barracks, on a sergeant’s pay.”

“Of course not, you foolish man.”

“Child, I have no money besides.”

“But I have; did you not know it? Yes, Aunt Winny left me eight hundred a-year, with a

recommendation to marry for love, if I could. Now Mr. Sabretasche, who is quite the most charming man I know, tells me that in a year or so you will have your commission. Until then I shall live 'retired.' Meantime, you are going to marry me at once."

"I won't do it," he said, stoutly.

"Oh yes you will," she replied, quietly. "If you don't, do you know what I shall do? I shall take lodgings in the town and loaf about the barrack gates, watching for you: and every time you appear, I shall cry aloud in heart-rending accents, 'Will you—will you—will you?' *ad libitum*."

"My darling, you cannot marry a sergeant," he cried, fighting desperately against himself.

"I not only can, but I will," she replied. "Why, bless the man, I shall not be Mrs. Sergeant Brown, but Lady Helen Brabazon; and it may only be for a few months."

"Then why not wait?"

"Because I won't. No, no, no! I tell you, I will not go away from Aldershot as Nell Fairfax. *I'll drown myself first!—there!*" she laughed. "Oh! it will be great fun. I shall have a nice house—say in Trinity Terrace—and a couple of maids, and a nice little carriage. Why, we shall be as jolly

as possible—only, they tell me, you may not live out of barracks.”

“And you shall not live in them,” he said, with much determination; “to that I have made up my mind.”

“Oh! then you have made up your mind to do as I tell you—otherwise?”

“I suppose so,” very reluctantly.

“Hugh,” she said, suddenly growing grave, “you do care for me still?”

“Oh! my darling,” he exclaimed.

“As much as ever?”

“A thousand times more!” he cried, passionately; “never a day that I have not thought of you; never a night that I did not see you in my dreams; never a church-parade that I did not pray for your happiness, never mind what my life would be without you.”

“Very considerate of you, I’m sure,” she remarked, nodding her head sagely; “very considerate, ve—ry! And did you ever wonder if I sometimes thought about you?”

“Often!”

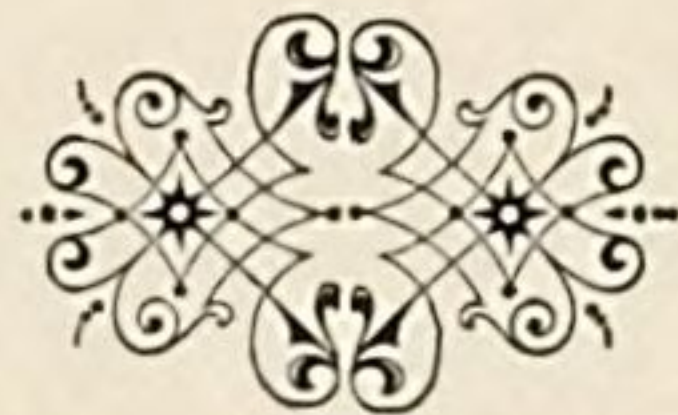
“I’m glad of that. I might have been married heaps of times, but, somehow—I say, Hugh, when you get your commission, we shall be quite ‘swagger’ people: with our two absurd titles, my eight

hundred a-year and your pay—why we shall be positively affluent.”

* * * * *

It was less than a year after this, that the following announcement appeared in the *Gazette*:

15th Lancers.—Sergeant the Honourable Hugh Brabazon to be Sub-Lieutenant, *vice* William Muirhead Tayte, promoted.



N—— ;

OR, AS WE GO ON.

SOONER or later—it may be sooner or it may be later, *but* sooner or later, and generally sooner—we find our evil deeds, words—nay, even our evil thoughts—come home to us : we get paid out—*as we go on !*

My pet theory is that no place of eternal punishment exists—if one does, our treatment is unfair, for do we not each and all expiate our sins—as we go on?

If we do something we know to be wilfully wrong, why it won't be very long before Nemesis comes down upon us with a crash and makes us wish we had left that particular thing undone ; if, on the other hand, we err through ignorance or foolishness, N —— swoops down upon us as relentlessly as a music-master's pencil on the knuckles of his pupil—we rub our knuckles and wish we hadn't done it, but the pain is there, all the same.

The rule applies equally well to every phase of life—from the highly criminal misdemeanours down to those little flirtations with sin, so slight that one can hardly tell if they be right or wrong. It is as universal as that we were all born and that we shall all

die—the only variation N—— permits is, that he sometimes pays his bills sooner, sometimes later; but I fancy most of my gentle readers will agree with me that he does not make a rule of taking long credit.

And not only to us of the present day does the theory apply—you may look as far back through the by-gone ages as you will, even to Adam and Eve, a period when our friend N—— had only just gone into business and had had but two customers, and there he is in full force. In many—nay, in most cases—the “paying out” seems inadequate to the particular evil deed, word, or thought for which our friend N—— has awarded it: just think of the lengthy punishment which followed—and faith! is still following—the purloining of that one apple!

There was Lot's wife—it could hardly have been agreeable to be turned into a pillar of salt, though probably she knew but little about it; and there was Hagar, who sniggered at Sarah! Aye! but N—— in the shape of Sarah herself, pulled her up sharp one fine morning, and I wonder how often after that did Madam Hagar wish she had kept a civil tongue in her head? I am afraid that is what a good many of us wish, besides Hagar, the bondwoman!

Of course, you have read the story of a wise old gentleman called Merlin, who lived ever so long ago—so long, that neither you nor I can fix the precise

date—a wise old man, who knew the artfulness of womankind as well as any wary woman-hating old bachelor in this, the enlightened nineteenth century : a wise old man, who knew pretty nearly everything there was to know. Who, I wonder, would have believed that he could be such an old fool as to lend an ear to Vivienne's blandishments—an utterly unscrupulous young person, whom he did not even like, possessed of a reputation which, like many other things, would not wash : an adventuress of the most pronounced type? N—— did not delay very long in presenting Merlin with his account—

And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
And lost to life and use, and name and fame.

From imaginary history into real is but a step—as many a one finds who slips ever so little from the realms of truth into the region of fiction—and there, staring us straight in the face, is the history of a certain king, who stuffed himself with lampreys *and died*. In that case N—— evidently considered a moderate paying-out of no use. Possibly he had tried it in the form of indigestion many times before, and without much effect, so clinched the matter by quietly putting His Majesty out of the way of lampreys for the future.

Out of the pages of history I might go on swelling my number of proofs *ad libitum*. There was Eliza-

beth, of gracious memory—good Queen Bess; a bad-tempered termagant she was, gad-zooks! Every child knows a story in which Bess, Essex, a countess, and a ring, played important parts—who, I wonder, would have been any of them? There was the Martyr King!—what of his promises? As I said, one might go on multiplying instances for ever, but that is what I must not do, for my story is strictly of the present day.

Perhaps in no class of life is my theory so indisputably apparent as it is in the service. Over every camp or barrack N—— keeps an eye, and careful indeed is he to keep his accounts in strict order. No vestige of a rule may be infringed, no duty shirked, no ill-temper pass unpunished, no honour remain unnoticed; and among the Scarlet Lancers no longer credit was given than in any other regiment.

The Scarlet Lancers had been nearly six months at Liliminster—quarters with which they were very well satisfied. They had good hunting, good society, roomy, comfortable barracks, a convenient hospital, and an excellent cathedral service on Sunday afternoon. Better than that, there was a circus—at least, during three months, one had been settled in the town—a respectable little theatre, and a subaltern who bore practical jokes with

the most angelic and lamb-like demeanour. Nay, I am not by any means sure that Anthony Geoghegan's disposition might not have ranked higher than either of the two standards I have quoted, for I fancy by the end of a month or so even an angel or a lamb would have rebelled against the course of treatment he was expected and, in fact, did undergo. Yes, he might have taken a very high rank, the first prize, indeed, if he had gone in for competition at a patience show, had not a circumstance occurred which caused a change. Every form of practical joke did he experience that the ingenuity of man could devise, but at last, after two years of martyrdom borne in uncomplaining silence, the trodden worm turned with such a vengeance that the gentlemen known as the officers of the Scarlet Lancers began to think it as well to run up no more 'ticks' with N——, by means, that is, of Anthony Geoghegan.

The awful change came about in this wise. Like many Irishmen, Anthony was of a fair-haired, blue-eyed type, a tall strong man, much given to laughing, and scarcely seeming to possess a temper at all. He was fairly well off, had no debts, and was not a little sick of barrack life and broken rest. So he fell over head and ears in love, and

announced to his disgusted comrades that he was going to be married. The Scarlet Lancers were utterly taken aback.

“Tony going to be married!” exclaimed Clarke, when Tony had departed, after making the announcement. “Oh! that’s the very devil.”

“Make the most of him whilst we have got him,” suggested Hartog.

“Who’s the girl?” asked Joey Parsons.

“Miss Linden,” returned Bob Sabretasche, “her father was Colonel of the 60th Hussars. Awfully nice girl, but I fancy rather a sharp temper.”

A comprehensive “Ah!” came from the lips of the several officers assembled, and in the mind of more than one an idea suggested itself that out of Miss Linden’s sharp temper not a little fun might be had. Whilst they were still talking over Tony’s engagement, he passed the windows of the mess-room, apparently with the intention of going into the town.

“Hollo, Tony!” shouted Hartog, throwing up the window beside which he was standing.

“Yes,” was shouted back.

“Do you dine here to-night?”

“No—concert in town,” was the answer.

“An idea has occurred to me,” said Hartog, shutting the window. “Tony is going to dine in

town—with Mrs. and Miss Linden, of course—afterwards going to a concert.”

“Yes,” said the others, crowding round him.

“Dundas five minutes ago got out of a hansom with his gun and eight or ten brace of young rooks dangling to a string.”

“Well?” they cried, impatiently.

“Well!” Hartog laughed; “Tony’s man will lay his things out early of course, and whilst he is at his tea we will place the young rooks—bless ’em—in connection with Tony’s dress clothes, and then, in all probability, we shall have considerable diversion at the concert this evening.”

“I don’t see the joke,” said Joey Parsons, at which three or four of the others laughed again.

“That’s because you are a Cockney, my child,” Hartog laughed. “But just try the experiment of shaking a few young rooks over your own clothes, and you’ll very soon find yourself in the plight our young lover will be in to-night.”

“Not fleas?” Joey ejaculated. “Oh! I think that will be rather beyond a joke—we’ve no business to worry the girl.”

“The girl had no business to hook one of our best men,” one growled in reply. “We shall *never* get another Tony.”

All unknowing of the plot against him, Anthony

Geoghegan rushed into barracks at the very last minute to dress, and without going into the mess-room jumped into a cab and drove off to his *fiancée's* domicile. Before he had got half way there Tony was woefully uncomfortable. *They* had found their way to his skin and were biting as if they had fasted for a month. Probably they found Tony better supplied with blood than the young rooks had been.

“Ugh! dash it,” muttered Tony to the cushions of the dilapidated cab, “I must have got a flea.”

A flea—dozens if he only knew it, but he didn't. He shook himself like a Newfoundland dog just out of the water, but, although perhaps he momentarily displaced them at their operations, they returned to the charge with more fury than ever, and Tony went into his lady-love's presence in as uncomfortable a state as ever any lover was in. Uncomfortable!—he was undergoing torture!

Miss Linden was alone in the drawing-room. Such a pretty girl, sharp as any hawk, with brilliant hazel eyes, nut-brown hair, and a complexion like cream, with just a dash of pink across the cheeks; a lovely girl, and at the sight of her Anthony Geoghegan forgot his bodily discomfort for a moment, and took her in his arms and kissed her.

“You have not been very long,” she said, smiling

up at him. "Mother is not yet ready."

"I'm glad of that—ersche!" with a great jump and a mental ejaculation of "Lord, how the devils do bite."

"What's the matter?" said Evelyn.

"Nothing, darling, just a twinge here, that was all," laying his hand on his left side.

"Your heart is not affected, Anthony?" she said, in sudden alarm.

"No, no, a mere stitch—ersche."

"Anthony, it is there still," she cried.

Another mental ejaculation of "yes, dash it—it's there safe enough."

"Suppose you give me a kiss—that will cure me safe enough," he suggested.

Miss Linden was not averse to the cure he proposed, and put her arms round his neck very affectionately—her arms were very pretty, Tony particularly noticed that, and her throat and bosom were as white as snow.

"What a pretty dress that is, Evelyn," he remarked. "I've not seen you wear it before."

"No; I'm glad you like it, dear. Do you think this colour suits me?" she asked.

"I believe there are two," returned Tony, absently.

"What?" said Evelyn, opening her brilliant eyes very wide. "Two what?"

“Er—, I believe I was thinking about something else,” he stammered, reddening a little. “Forgive me, darling, you were speaking about the dress. Yes! I like that soft creamy colour very much, and those quaint yellowish trimmings are charming.”

Soon after, Mrs. Linden appeared, and they went in to dinner. At first Evelyn talked a good deal, but gradually relapsed into comparative silence, and Mrs. Linden had all the conversation to herself.

“This is dreadful,” said Tony to himself; “I shall never be able to exist through the concert.”

He watched his *fiancée* furtively, and presently noticed an uneasy movement of one shoulder, and saw one little hand steal up the sleeve of her gown.

“She’s got one,” he thought; “there must have been ever so many.”

However, at last the repast was ended; and after a cup of coffee, they betook themselves in a cab to the concert room: Mrs. and Miss Linden, of course, occupying the back seat. That fatal drive! No sooner did Mrs. Linden, who was a lady of ample proportions, get settled in her chair, than she whispered to her daughter, who sat between her and Tony—

“My dear, I’ve got a flea about me.”

“So have I,” returned Evelyn, tragically; “I believe I have got two.”

Then she had to listen to a tender little speech from Tony—he had a lull just then—but as soon as she turned her head, Mrs. Linden claimed her attention again.

“My dear, I shall never be able to stay all the evening. This thing is driving me crazy. I never could sit quiet with a flea about me.”

“Hus—sh—sh—sh,” whispered Evelyn, with a nervous glance behind her. She just looked aside in time to see Tony make a vigorous attack upon one arm; he had taken the opportunity, whilst her head was turned, to give his sleeve a good scrub up and down. He reddened so visibly, that an unworthy and suspicious thought made its way into her mind.

“Dear me,” she reflected, “I’ve heard Irish people are dirty, but—” She gave one swift side glance at Tony’s fair skin and spotless linen, and immediately went off into a fit of laughter, impossible to explain, in spite of his entreaties that she should do so; but for all that perfectly intelligible to half-a-dozen pairs of eyes, looking on from the other side of the room.

Assured of the success of their plan, Jack Hartog and his confederates continued the treatment, and

for a fortnight or so the three victims were submitted—by means of poor Tony—to a perfect plague of fleas.

“It is a most extraordinary thing,” exclaimed Mrs. Linden, one evening, after Tony had taken his departure, and she had been entertaining on a more lavish scale than usual, “that when Anthony comes, I seem to have these things worse than ever. I’m sure it’s far too early in the year for them. I can’t think where they all come from.”

It happened that on that very same evening Tony went back to his room rather earlier than the mischief-makers expected, and surprised them at work with the batch of young rooks, which daily fell victims to become the means of discomfort to three unsuspecting and unoffending people. Tony entered the room quietly, not from any desire to creep in unawares, but simply because his thoughts were occupied and he was therefore walking slowly. The scene which presented itself was decidedly a novel one. Round the sofa-bed, with its bearskin cover, stood five or six officers, and in their midst Jack Hartog, with the bunch of birds tied on to the end of a stick. He was shaking and rolling them upon the fur rug vigorously, amidst roars of laughter from the entire assembly.

“What the devil are you doing?” exclaimed

Tony, in very genuine and open-mouthed astonishment.

The group confronted him, with a start, but Jack Hartog turned round coolly, with the stick still in his hand.

“Oh! it’s you, is it, old man? What’s brought you back so soon?”

“It’s half-past ten,” Tony answered. “What on earth are you doing here, and what the deuce are those birds for?”

“Birds!” Jack repeated; “what birds?”

“Why those young rooks, you’ve got tied to that stick, of course,” Tony retorted.

“Well, the fact is, we were going to put them into your bed,” Hartog said at last, with a great air of making a clean breast of the matter. “Little joke, you see, Tony. There, now, don’t turn crusty, old chap. We’ve let you alone lately, and we haven’t much more time left to plague you in.”

The light began to dawn upon Tony’s mind. He crossed the room, and in silence took a pistol from its case on a side table.

“Now,” he said, quietly, “you fellows clear out of my room or, upon my soul, I’ll fire. I’ve found you out, at last, but take my word for it, you’ve played your last joke in this room.”

After a faint show of resistance they did leave

the room, Hartog allowing the birds to remain on the floor. Tony picked them up, slipped them off the stick, and flung them after the retreating party, catching Hartog just in the nape of the neck, and, as Tony said to himself, with a grim laugh, making him thoroughly uncomfortable for the rest of the night.

He shut the door and locked it, flung the fur rug from the bed into a remote corner, and sat down to think. Now, nine times out of ten, when a man or woman sits down for the express purpose of thinking, the matter on hand is of an unpleasant nature! So was it with Anthony Geoghegan. His thoughts were very bitter, for not an hour previously Evelyn Linden had spoken to him very seriously, and asked him to take back his ring and consider the engagement at an end. Naturally, he had pressed her to give him some reason, but in vain. She only repeated that she wished the engagement at an end.

“Tell me you no longer care for me,” he said to her, “and I’ll go away and never trouble you again.”

“I cannot marry you,” said Evelyn, evading his question.

“What have I done?” the poor fellow cried. “Oh! Evelyn, I would have made you so happy.”

Miss Linden shuddered—yes, positively shuddered, as Tony particularly noticed.

“It is of no use, Mr. Geoghegan, I have not been happy the last fortnight, neither has my mother, and, believe me, it is best at an end.”

Until he reached his room her decision had puzzled him, but the little episode of the rooks had enlightened him considerably—poor little darling, she had been eaten alive as he had been. However, to-morrow he would go and ask her plainly if that was the cause of his dismissal, and then, surely, everything would come right.

Unfortunately, he was on duty the next day and could not get out of barracks, but on the day following that he hurried to Mrs. Linden's house and found—*the place shut up*.

For a moment Anthony was bewildered—then it dawned upon him that, after all, the fleas could not have been the cause of Evelyn's desire to close the engagement: evidently, she wanted to be rid of him; evidently, she cared nothing about him. He remembered how, on the night of the concert, she had put her soft white arms round his neck and kissed him, but it had all been a sham—make-believe love—counterfeit coin!

He never thought of writing to her or of trying some time in the future to win her woman's heart.

Oh! no. The Scarlet Lancers had accomplished their end finely, but the process had left Anthony Geoghegan with a decided distaste for practical jokes; indeed, if the truth be told, he vowed a mighty vow that his brother officers should get no more fun out of him.

Nor did they! During the morning of the following day a couple of intelligent workmen appeared, asking for Mr. Geoghegan. He took them up to his room, and they spent about a quarter-of-an-hour measuring the dimensions of the doorway with a foot-rule.

“Going to have an iron door put, Tony?” was the careless question of an officer passing.

“Oh, no!” returned Tony, in as careless a tone.

For a week nothing new appeared in Tony’s quarters, but at the end of that period the intelligent workmen came on the scene again, one carrying a bass full of tools, the other having a large, light burden, carefully enveloped in cloths. They made their way to Tony’s room, the door was closed, and, beyond a little screwing and hammering, no one could guess what was going on.

Tony himself gave them no opportunity of discovering. He did not go to dinner until the very last minute, and when one who had waited to see him leave his room tried the door, it was

locked. Evidently there was some mystery in Tony's apartment, but whatever it was, Tony did not enlighten them. He was a little quiet throughout the meal, but not in the least sulky, and towards eleven o'clock betook himself to bed, with a civil "good-night."

The conspirators waited half-an-hour or so before they followed him, as they had done regularly every night since he had caught them with the rooks. They stepped softly along the corridor and tried the door.

It was open!

Yes; the handle turned easily and the door opened. Clarke and Hartog stepped into the room lighted only by the fire-glow, when "Hur—r—r—r—ah!" was their simultaneous cry.

"What is it?" asked those in the rear, pushing them forward again to meet that invisible enemy, which once more extracted that shuddering cry from both of them.

"What the deuce is it?" cried another, pressing forward. "Oh—h! Lord, what's that?"

"Galvanism," replied Hartog; "but where is it? Hi! get a light, somebody, and let's find out what and where the confounded thing is."

Clarke fetched a light from his room opposite, and beheld, if you please, a square cage, fitting

completely over the door, made of strong brass wire, and attached to it an electric battery, which stood on a table by Tony's bed.

"Oh, there can't be much strength in that," said Hobbs, scornfully, "I'll pull that down in two minutes."

"Try," returned Hartog, shaking his fingers.

He put his back against it and tried to force the wires through, but Tony turned on such a current of electricity that the youthful Hercules fell to the ground in something very much like a swoon.

"Oh! hang it, Tony, don't kill the poor chap!" exclaimed Hartog.

"Take the poor chap out of my room, then," returned Tony, from under the bed-clothes, "and don't trouble yourselves to come drawing me any more. I am perfectly sick of it, and, bedad, I won't have any more of it;" after which, he rolled himself afresh in the bed-clothes, and refused to utter another word.

And that was all about it! The *dénouement* is awfully flat, is it not? Yet, when a thing comes to an utter and complete close, one can make neither more nor less of it.

So the officers of the Scarlet Lancers felt flat — very! It was no use attempting any more fun with Tony. They began to wish his

engagement had gone on, for it would have been better to have lost him altogether than to have had that tantalizing birdie inside that impregnable electric cage. And Tony was so wonderfully good-tempered about it, too ; if he would only have sulked, or been disagreeable, it would not have been half so bad. Ah ! N—— had taken a novel way of paying off old scores that time.

And Evelyn Linden—what of her ? She and her mother remained some months away from Liliminster, on an allowance of so much a week from N——. His coinage was varied—bitter tears, sad sighs, sleepless nights, yearnings, longings, regrets. Poor Evelyn !

It was not long after their return home that Joey Parsons, in a burst of confidence, told her all about the plot of the rooks and the electric cage. She said very little ; but when the good-natured young soldier had gone, she wept—tears so bitter, that N—— relented and put an idea into her mind to write Tony a note, asking him to call on her. She sent it by the man-servant, expecting he might perhaps come the next day, but within an hour he appeared—flushed with expectation and hope.

“ Oh ! Tony,” she cried, springing from her seat ; and Tony kissed her ——.

A REGIMENTAL LODGE ;

OR, HOW JACK HARTOG WAS MADE A FREEMASON.

CHAPTER I.

“TAKE my advice, Jack,” said old General Hartog to his son, when he joined the Scarlet Lancers, “never be surprised at anything. Take everything as a matter of course, and if the laugh happens to turn against yourself—laugh harder than any of ’em.”

“Very well, sir,” said Jack, cheerfully.

“And remember this, if—and of course they will—if they attempt to hoax you, always let them play the game out, before you show them you are not such a fool as you look.”

“I suppose I do look a fool,” said Jack, rather ruefully, stealing a glance at himself in the glass opposite.

“Well, my dear lad, you’re an uncommon fine fellow, there’s no doubt about it,” the old soldier answered, eyeing his son’s six feet of splendid manhood proudly; “but men who don’t manage to get into the army before one-and-twenty—and then do it by the back door, otherwise the militia—

can't be said to be particularly distinguished in the brain line."

"No, I daresay not," returned Jack, carelessly. "Well, never mind, sir, I'm a first-rate shot, good cross country, A-1 at lawn tennis, and a very decent hand at whist; and if there's any fighting, I'll let them see that I'm worthy of my name—see if I don't."

"I don't fear but that you'll do that, Jack," said the old man, with something like a mist gathering before his keen blue eyes. "I need not have said anything nasty about the back-door, I might have remembered there were no examinations in my time."

"Oh! never mind," cried Jack, lightly.

He was not thin-skinned concerning his mental accomplishments; did any one of his own standing chaff him about past failures, he would quote coolly—

"No, I tarn't speak Frenss an' I tarn't speak German, but I tan punss your 'ed."

A speech which, with the addition of a certain swaggering gesture of his strong right hand and arm, generally had the effect of diverting the current of the conversation into widely different channels.

A few days later this handsome, swaggering young fool left the paternal mansion for the quarters

of the Scarlet Lancers, just then at Blankhampton, where, as is not invariably the case, he met with a cordial reception. His brother officers "took" to him. He was very goodly to look upon, for he had a nice, fresh, fair face, with blue smiling eyes and a pleasant mouth, disclosing good even teeth; he was tall and straight, too, with firm, strong, graceful limbs, and an inexhaustible fund of good humour. They all declared he was "awfully" good tempered. Their most trying jokes he bore with blissful good nature; which, though it perhaps took a little from the zest of their amusement, decidedly won their admiration and esteem. When they amused themselves by smashing his furniture, he set to work and smashed with the best or the worst of them.

"Do you think I'm going to see my things smashed and have none of the fun?" he demanded, coolly.

When he found every coat, tunic and jacket he possessed carefully sewn as to arm-holes and pockets, instead of flying into a rage, as they expected, he sat down on his bed, and cried "Splendid!" And when they got into his room one night, when there had been a big mess, and cropped his fair curly hair like a convict or a Frenchman, he sold them all by going into raptures of admiration over his

appearance every time he came within sight of a mirror. After that they left him alone ; they said it was no use chaffing such a fool.

If Jack had quietly allowed matters to remain there, I need never have written this history ; but unfortunately, from his youth up, he had been impressed with an idea that the inner life of a cavalry regiment is absolute Pandemonium. No doubt in the general's younger days it was so ; for his stories so far threw the doings and misdoings of the Scarlet Lancers into the shade, that his son, so far from perceiving that they were tired of playing their practical jokes upon him, only imagined the calm preceded, instead of succeeded, the storm. He was, therefore, more closely on the look-out for chaff than ever ; and bearing in mind that he was always to let them play their game out, before he shewed the extent of his wisdom, expressed no surprise on hearing that there were a good many Freemasons in the regiment, and that they had a lodge of their own.

He simply did not believe it ! He had never heard of anything of the kind from his father, and imagined in the casual mention of the institution that a deep-laid plan was brewing for his especial delectation.

“I suppose you are not a Mason, Hartog ?” said

the major, one evening after mess, a few days after Jack had first heard of the lodge.

“No, sir—wish I was,” said he, with apparent innocence, though he was ready to burst with laughter.

“Do you? Oh! there is no difficulty about the matter. There is no lodge here in Blankhampton, and a good many are glad of the opportunity of joining ours. I fancy when we leave they will form one. We have a lodge to-night, shall I propose you?”

“If you please, sir,” said Jack, cheerfully.

“I encourage soldiers to join—though, as you probably know, we are not allowed to *invite* persons to join our body—I always encourage any desire to do so. A soldier never knows to what part of the world he may not be sent at an hour’s notice; and if he is a Freemason he will always find a lodge open to him, or brother Masons to hold out the hand of fellowship to him.”

“Exactly,” said Jack, rather hazily.

“Perhaps, Scot, you will second him?” the major said, turning to a grizzled old captain on his right.

“To be sure, major,” with a merry twinkle in his hard blue-grey eyes—or what seemed so to Jack.

"You're in for it. What a fool you were to say yes," laughed a subaltern afterwards.

"Oh! I always was a fool—all the Hartogs are," returned Jack, with praiseworthy good nature. "I wonder what they do? Are you one of 'em?"

"Oh, no! I'm a Catholic."

"Well, what's that got to do with it?"

"Priests won't let us have anything to do with 'em. Never knew what it was to be thankful on that score before; shut the major's blarney up in a moment."

"What do they do?"

"Stick you on a red-hot gridiron, and chivvy you round the room with a poker."

"Oh! come now," incredulously.

"So they say, but of course I can't speak from experience. By Jove, though, what a fool you were to say yes."

"Well, if they begin any of that stuff on me, I shall take to my fists," laughed Jack, of course thinking Vane in the secret also.

"I wonder what kind of a jumble they'll make of it," quoth he to himself that night, as he slowly undressed. "Of course, their game will be to gull me enough to make me long to get into a genuine concern, and get kicked out as a consequence."

Lord! what a joke to tell my old governor; it beats his yarns hollow."

CHAPTER II.

By means of moveable furniture, ornaments and jewels, the members of the Scarlet Lancer Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons had made a very pretty interior. A spare troop-room had been divided by temporary partitions into the correct form of an oblong square, vestibule and outer room. They were necessarily obliged to dispense with the three grand pillars—the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian; but the ceiling was painted in a representation of a celestial canopy of divers colours. They had a very handsome floor-covering of moveable parquetry work to represent the mosaic pavement, the blazing star, and the indented or tessellated border; the tracing board, rough and perfect ashlers, were also in due position, and all the other paraphernalia of skull and cross-bones, coffin, tassels and the like.

It was to this room that Jack Hartog made his way on the evening appointed for his initiation into the secrets and privileges of Freemasonry. He was met by a sergeant, acting as Steward, who

was waiting in the outer room to prepare him for entrance. It occurred to him, when the man explained his duties, that it was scarcely the right thing to bring a non-commissioned officer into the working of a practical joke upon a subaltern; and for the first time he, like his father, pronounced the non-purchase system a mistake.

"It has lowered the tone of the army," said Jack to himself.

"You'll have to take your jacket off, sir," said the Steward.

"My jacket; why?"

"It is necessary, sir," was the answer.

Jack shrugged his shoulders, but off came the jacket. "Any more?"

"Your waistcoat also."

Off came the embroidered waistcoat—he began to wish himself out of the business safely.

"You must bare your right arm, sir," the Steward continued.

"I say, they're not going to tattoo me?" he asked, apprehensively.

"No, sir," with an amused laugh. "Now, undo your shirt at the throat, and pull up your left trouser so as to leave the knee bare."

"Anything more?" Jack asked, satirically.

"Oh, yes! slip your right heel out of your boot."

“Well, of all the tom-foolery!” Jack began, too hopelessly surprised to be in the least amused.

“And empty your pockets and take your rings off.”

“Lord bless me!” he ejaculated, blankly.

“Hollo! what’s that for?” as the sergeant lifted a rope with a running noose.

“To put round your neck—it is technically called a cable-tow.”

“Then let me tell you, you are not going to put what is technically called a cable-tow round my neck,” said Jack, with considerable decision.

“Must be done, sir, if you mean to be initiated to-night.”

“Oh! blow your initiation—and what’s that for?”

“To blindfold you.”

“Blindfold me! Not if I know it! Why, I might be scalped, before I could say ‘Jack Robinson.’”

“No fear of that,” laughing outright.

“Well, all this tom-foolery,” glancing down at his odd figure, “is quite enough, without the rope or the bandage, and I don’t intend to submit to either of them.”

“You cannot enter the Lodge without them,” was the decided reply. “Wait a moment, sir, and I’ll fetch one of the officers out, who will convince you that it is really necessary.”

He went to the door of the Lodge, giving one distinct rap—so Jack thought, but it was the Tyler who performed the ceremony—and after an instant's parley, Captain Scot came out and asked what was amiss?

“Why, they want to put that rope round my neck,” said Jack, indignantly.

“Of course.”

“And to blindfold me?”

“To be sure—the two most absolutely necessary parts of the ceremony.”

“Then I’ll be d——d if I will,” said Jack, emphatically, sitting down on the chair, and beginning to straighten his apparel.

“You can do as you like, of course, my dear chap,” said the grizzled captain, good-naturedly; “but as the colonel and the major are both enthusiastic Masons, and as the major has proposed you himself you will seriously offend them both, besides making yourself the laughing-stock of the regiment. They will all say you were too big a coward to join.”

That decided him, and, with a great sigh, he resigned himself to go on.

“Now look here—if there is any red-hot iron business, I shall kill the first man I get hold of,” he said, as his senior left him.

"All right," with a laugh.

"Now, sir," said the Steward, leading him to the door.

It was as well that he was in ignorance of the pointed sword held to his breast as he walked, or he would probably have turned tail, in spite of that significant hint about making himself the laughing-stock of the regiment.

There was a moment's parley between the Steward and the Tyler; then the latter gave three distinct knocks. This was followed by a rap from within, the signal of alarm, and, after a slight pause, a voice asked,

"Who is there?"

"A poor candidate is in a state of darkness," answered the Steward, "who comes of his own free will and accord, and also properly prepared, humbly soliciting to be admitted to the mysteries and privileges of Freemasonry."

("Draw it mild," put in Jack, *sotto voce*.)

"Be serious, sir, it is a grave business," exclaimed the Steward, earnestly.)

"How does he hope to obtain these privileges?" asked the Inner Guard.

"By the help of God and the tongue of good report."

"Halt, till I make due report."

Then there was a repetition within concerning the poor candidate in a state of darkness, during which Jack resigned himself to the inevitable, with a murmured protest on the utter profanity of the proceedings.

“And I don’t go in for being saintly myself,” he ended.

“You’ll get into serious trouble if you are not quiet,” came in a warning whisper from his guide.

Then the door was flung wide open that they might enter; it closed behind him, and retreat was effectually cut off.

CHAPTER III.

It was about two hours later that Jack Hartog, once more clothed in his mess-dress, went into the mess-room, where those who had dined at the late dinner still lingered. He was hailed with a shout of laughter and “Now then, brother, how did you get on?”

“Frightened you out of your wits, hey?”

“Have a glass of champagne, my boy,” and the like.

Jack seated himself and made a grave survey of the faces assembled round the table.

"I don't go in for being straight-laced," he remarked, deliberately, "I wasn't brought up in that way; but upon my word, they went beyond a joke to-night."

"What did they do, Jack? What's it like? Did they stick you on the gridiron?"

"Not a bit of it! Never heard of a tamer sell in my life."

"Well, what did they do?"

"They just made a fool of me," said Jack, ruefully.

"Impossible, Jack! that was already accomplished," laughed one.

"But what did they do? come tell us," cried another.

"Well, first they undressed me."

"Undressed you!" with a great yell of laughter.

"Very nearly: I had to take off my jacket and waistcoat, empty my pockets and pull off my rings, my shirt was undone at the throat, my right arm and my left knee bare, and my right heel pulled out of my boot. Then they stuck a rope round my neck and a bandage over my eyes—under which, all the same, after a little judicious frowning and wrinkling of my nose, I could see beautifully."

"Yes, what then?"

“Oh! a lot of blarney about a poor candidate in a state of darkness begging for light, and all that rot. Oh! it was splendidly got up, only the ceremony was awful trash; any fool could have seen through it in a moment.”

“Why, Hartog, you don’t think it was a joke—a trick?” said one of the listeners, suddenly perceiving the truth.

“Of course it was; never heard such twaddle in the whole course of my life.”

“My dear chap, it was the real thing,” Kerr asserted.

“Oh, yes! no doubt,” with a knowing laugh. “You’re all in the joke, and think you’ll be able to gull me into trying to get into a real Freemasons’ club, and get kicked out. Ah! but I *ain’t* quite such a fool as I look.”

“Hartog, I assure you there is no joke at all about it,” he persisted.

“Well, now look here,” said Jack, “I’ve an uncle, who’s ever such a great swell in the lodge the Prince of Wales belongs to, and I’ve often tried to get the secrets and things out of him; though of course I never could. Whenever I chaff him about Freemasonry, he invariably turns as solemn as you please, and says it is a very impressive and grave ritual, requiring a great deal

of thought and care to understand and get proficient in. He *couldn't* say that of all the humbug and tom-foolery that went on to-night. Why, *every* one knows that the Freemasons' signs and secrets are awfully difficult to learn, and this was what they showed me to-night—that's the first sign," making, as he spoke, the sign of an entered apprentice.

One of his hearers rather recoiled. "Don't do that again, Jack, it's so horribly suggestive—particularly with knives about. Ugh! it gives one the shivers."

"Well, that was it—the first. No, I'm wrong, the first was a kind of goose-step; then that; then the grip, which"—holding out his hand for any of them to take—"was just that and nothing more. As if I was such a fool as to swallow all that."

"Did you swear much, Jack?" some one asked.

"Oh! no end—on my knees too—most profane, I consider it. Yes, on my knees, with my right hand on the Bible, and holding one point of the compasses to my heart, so. Well, I cannot say what I did not swear, all sorts of impossible things. There was something about cutting my throat, and tearing my tongue out by the roots, and burying my body in sand of the sea at low water mark."

“What! Burying yourself?” cried a laughing voice.

Jack looked puzzled for a moment. “No, I suppose they were to bury me,” he replied; “and, between you and me, gentlemen, I am thoroughly ashamed of having had any part in the affair. I don’t go in for being saintly, as I told you, I wasn’t brought up in that way, but I have some respect for sacred things, and I don’t approve of bringing the Bible and the name of the Almighty into practical jokes, and I’m very much surprised at a man of the major’s age for doing so.”

“Well, don’t let him hear you say so, that’s all,” laughed Lucian.

“Hartog, it is not a joke,” repeated Kerr, emphatically, for the third time.

“Kerr, it was a joke,” returned Jack, with equal emphasis. “I tell you there was something about that chap that was after Ruth—I forget his name—and what could he possibly have to do with Freemasonry?”

“Oh! that was——” began Lucian, then broke off short, for in the doorway leading from the ante-room stood the major himself, looking straight at Hartog, with a face of thunder.

Lucian’s sudden stop and look of blank dismay caused every head to turn that way, and a hush, as

of death, fell upon the excited group. In an instant Jack realised the truth! For the first time in his life he knew what a sensation of sickening fear meant—he could not think or speak, he was conscious of nothing but that those terrible cold eyes were fixed upon him, and that he had made a mistake which would probably wreck his whole life.

Amid that death-like silence Major Bernard advanced into the room, and laid his hand upon the back of a vacant chair at the head of the table, his cold eyes—like the flash of steel, several of them thought—were still fixed upon Jack's fast-whitening face.

At last he spoke—not loudly, but in the suppressed voice of a man utterly possessed by a storm of intense passion.

“Well, sir,” he said, at length, in accents of cutting scorn, “you are a credit—to—your regiment—a cred—it—sir.”

Jack spoke no word—only his widely-opened blue eyes remained fixed upon his superior's, with a fascination piteous to behold.

“You have this evening,” the major went on, in the same terribly low tone, “taken solemn oaths before God and your fellow men, which you have broken. Do you know, sir, that you have ruined

your life—that you have forfeited your claim to be called a gentleman, and earned the contempt of every honourable man?”

“I—I thought—” Jack began, piteously, but Major Bernard cut him short, and continued—

“Your evidence would not be accepted in any court of justice in the world, sir,” he said, scornfully, “do you know that?”

Jack looked despairingly around, and caught at the arm of the man next to him, that he might steady himself. The major went on—

“How is it possible that your father’s son can have so little value for his honour, so little respect for himself, so little respect for a stainless name, which to honourable men is in itself alone another term for chivalry and valour, I cannot imagine. Have you no notion of the value of your word? Have you no respect for your solemn oath?”

Again he tried to speak, but this time his trembling lips refused their office, and the sound died away in his throat. Only he held Kerr’s arm with a harder grip, and his blue eyes remained fixed on his major’s face, as they had done from the beginning, while in his brain and heart one question was repeating itself over and over again, “What will the general say?”

“All I have to say is,” said the major, “that

you will be formally expelled from the body of Freemasons, and that my private acquaintance with you is, from this day, at an end. I have done."

He turned on his heel, as if to leave the room, but Jack suddenly loosed his hold of Kerr's arm, and with one despairing look at the major, staggered out. As the door crashed behind him Major Bernard turned back to those standing about the table.

"I suppose, gentlemen, he has told you everything?" he asked.

"Everything," replied one or two voices.

He was once more turning away, but Kerr stopped him.

"Wait a moment, sir," he said, hastily, "I must give you some explanation of this, since Hartog seemed unable to do so. He really believed the whole affair was an elaborate practical joke. I have been trying to convince him that such was not the case, ever since he came in here. Is it not so?" appealing to the others.

"Yes—certainly."

"A joke!" echoed the senior, indignantly, "I play a joke upon him—a lad like that—or, indeed, upon any one. He must be a fool."

"I don't think he is particularly clever, sir," Kerr answered, "and as for what he told us, it

didn't amount to much, for we couldn't make head or tail of it—neither for the matter of that did he seem able to do. I think you may trust him to divulge nothing further, and you have our word that what he has disclosed is safe with us. Is it not so?" turning to the others once more.

"Oh, yes—yes, of course!" they all cried.

But the major was not thus easily to be mollified.

"Utterly without principle," he muttered, grimly.
"Hollo! What's that?"

That was the sound of a pistol-shot, followed by a heavy fall on the floor above.

"Good God! the young idiot has shot himself!" cried Kerr, pushing the major unceremoniously aside. He ran along the verandah and dashed up the stairs of the quarters adjoining, just as a trooper's rough voice rang out vigorously for help. The adjutant's wife ran out of her rooms on the same floor, and several officers and servants followed Kerr, who forced the door open with one shove of his strong shoulder, to find Hartog lying on the floor, bleeding profusely from a wound in the shoulder.

"I was in his room when he come up," said the servant, as they turned him over. "He told me to go out, and I seed something was up—I heard the click of the pistol, and I must just have

tried to bang the door in as he took aim, and startled him."

"Hollo! what's this?" exclaimed the old surgeon-major, entering.

"It's your damned Freemason tom-foolery!" returned Kerr, savagely. "Is he much hurt?" in a gentler tone.

"No, no, nasty flesh wound through the shoulder—have him off the sick-list in a fortnight. Now clear out, all of you; Mrs. Gray will stay with me, and Ford, you stop; all the rest, clear out—we can do better without you."

They went back to the mess-room, where they found the major, very white and grave, and with all the anger and sternness faded from his face.

"How is he, not dangerously hurt, I hope?"

The intense anxiety in his tones rather touched Kerr, who had mentally determined as he descended the stairs to make out the worst possible case, and give him as great a fright as he could.

"Moore seems to think the danger lies in possible contraction of the muscles," he answered, "the ball has gone clean through the top part of the shoulder."

"There is only one way in which his life can be saved from ruin," said a young officer, coming forward, "and that is for us all to get made Masous at once."

“You are right; I had thought of it,” Major Bernard answered. “It is not customary—indeed it is forbidden that we should invite others to join our body, but I have the greatest respect for his father—a braver soldier and a truer gentleman does not live—and I had already determined to ask you, who have heard his folly to-night, to save him from further trouble concerning it.”

“I shall be very glad,” said Kerr, without hesitation.

“And I—and I,” in a chorus from the others.

“And what about Vane—he is a Catholic?” asked Major Bernard.

“I have been sitting with Gwynne all the evening, major. I only ran out when I heard the pistol-shot.”

“That is all right,” in a relieved tone; “oh, here is Moore. How is the patient?”

“Conscious again, and crying on Mrs. Gray’s shoulder like a baby. What a nice little woman she is. I say, what was the matter?—a quarrel?”

“Oh, no—only a mistake,” said the major, who, now that his anger was gone, did not care to further publish Jack’s misdoings. “Perhaps, Kerr, you will go up and set his mind at rest. I will come and see him in the morning. For the rest, gentlemen, I need not ask your silence and your forbearance.”

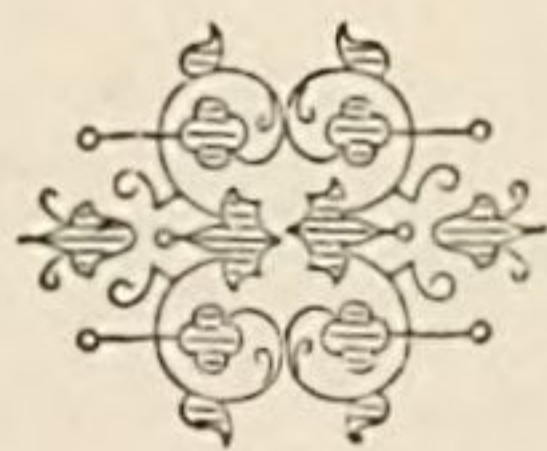
“No, major, no—certainly not.”

“And the request comes with a good grace from you,” growled Kerr, as the door closed behind him.

“Poor Jack wasn’t far out of it,” remarked Lucian, when the still angry Kerr had betaken himself to comfort poor crest-fallen Jack upstairs, “it must be a precious tom-foolery business. They won’t get me there a second time, I can tell you.”

“Poor old Jack,” how the major did slang him,” laughed another. “I say, what was that about Ruth?”

“It wasn’t Ruth,” returned Lucian, “it was Boaz.”



CONSCIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

HE was alone; a handsome, grey-eyed, sunburnt man, in a fairly-comfortable room. I am not going to describe it; only so far as to say that the chair in which he sat was a very big one, and that the fire, to which his long legs were stretched, blazed half-way up the chimney, though it was but the beginning of October.

“Oh! confound—*every*-thing,” he observed disconsolately to the walls, or maybe the fire, and clasping his hands at the back of his smooth sunshiny head. “I don’t know what to do. I’ll be hanged if I know what to do. Poor little Pussey, how her face did cut me up. I can’t get it out of my head; nor the widow’s either, for that matter. Poor little Pussey! and yet I can’t help myself.”

He upheaved himself from the depths of the big chair—a fine fellow, nearly six feet in height, with clean active limbs and a perplexed handsome face; grey as to the eyes, and fair, if a good deal sunburnt, as to the complexion; just the man every

one calls "Charlie" on the very slightest provocation.

As he marched about the little room, his long legs sadly inconvenienced by its narrow confines, the door opened, after a knock from sturdy knuckles, and a lancer in the usual cavalry soldier's *déshabillé* of unbuttoned jacket and his cap at the very back of his head, entered, carrying carefully a small parcel, a pair of newly varnished boots and a sword.

"What's that, Fraser?" the officer asked, wheeling round.

"Parcel, surr!" returned Fraser—not his regular servant, who was on sick-leave.

Opened, it proved to be a box containing a bunch of dainty blue forget-me-nots, over which, despite Fraser's presence, Charlie Kerr fairly groaned aloud.

"Here! stick 'em into water and get me dressed for mess—sharp," he said, smothering a second groan.

"Here's a label on 'em, surr," remarked Fraser, as he lifted the flowers out of their cotton-wool covering.

"A label!" taking it impatiently—then read "*For the last time. Good bye.*" A moment later the label was burnt to a cinder, and Kerr had turned to the toilette-table.

“Get me dressed—sharp,” he repeated.

There were other flowers in the room besides the forget-me-nots—a great Indian enamelled tray filled with the rarest hot-house exotics and ferns, waxen camillias, fragrant tuberose, gardenias, moss-rose buds, eucharis lilies and many others; flowers more fit for the bridal bouquet of a princess than for the bare-looking room of a cavalry officer. They had come up from the town but an hour ago, from the handsome widow, whose face, just then, filled his heart, together with a little woe-begone countenance belonging to the sender of the forget-me-nots—Pussey, whose message had been, “*Good bye.*”

“Well, if this here ain’t a rum start,” mused Fraser to himself, trying to fit the message on the label with the perplexed shadow in his master’s grey clouded eyes—the eyes that the men of the Scarlet Lancers were wont to declare could see straight through a stone wall.

He would have thought it a considerable “rummer” start, if, after he had left the officer alone, he could have seen him bending over the dainty blue flowers—irresolution in his heart—a forgotten tenderness on his tongue—and what were almost like tears in his grey eyes.

“Poor little Pussey! Shall I go back and make

friends with you again? You'll forgive me, I know—nobody'll ever be as fond of me as you, and yet——” He lifted up his eyes to the brilliant hot-house blooms, and in one instant all the old tender pure love had vanished, before a remembrance of the newer, stronger passion, for the rich handsome widow, who had taken his heart captive by one single glance.

“Lord help me! I'm getting more like a drivelling idiot than anything else,” he muttered savagely between his white teeth, and with another great groan; “oh! but these women do play the very deuce with one. The poor little woman will get over it and marry a curate in next to no time. Anyway, it wouldn't have done to marry her, feeling as I do—it wouldn't have been fairly honest. There's dinner—faugh! all the sherry and bitters in the mess won't give me an appetite to-night.”

Just then the door of the opposite room was opened and a young man came forth, singing gaily to the time of his spurred heels:

“Over the hills and far away!
In a village by the sea,
A small sweet rose of a maiden dwells,
Who is dear, so dear to me.”

Charlie Kerr flung open his door, with a very audible and a very naughty word.

“What’s the matter *now*?” laughed a voice behind him.

“Oh, I hate fellows who sing!” Kerr growled, testily. “Always caterwauling about the place like a confounded maid-of-all-work.”

“With loving lips and true grey eyes,
I call her my Rose-Marie!
Over the hills and far away,
Dwells my love, my Rose-Marie.”

Sang Calvert in front of them.

“You’re engaged to some girl down in the West, ain’t you?” Preston laughed.

“No, I’m not,” curtly.

“But you were,” rejoined Preston, quickly, adding to himself, as Kerr looked stonily at nothing, “Ho, ho! my friend, so that’s where the shoe pinches, is it?”

Of a certainty the shoe did pinch horribly, though not quite in the place Preston thought.

I wonder, is there any pinch of a moral kind, which is not somewhat alleviated by one’s dinner? Under the influence of gravy soup and salmon the discomfort of Kerr’s pinch subsided considerably; an *entrée* of chicken’s livers; and venison, with French beans, found him at peace (*pro tem.*) with himself, the world, and every one else. He had not reached that age when a mess-dinner becomes a nuisance; when a man listens impatiently to oft-told stories,

and looks to the rising of the senior officer as a blessed relief. He was young and strong, and handsome, if not possessed of any very great intellectual powers; he enjoyed hearing Power tell how he had "spotted" the prettiest little girl that afternoon he had seen for a twelve-month, "With eyes like saucers, I give you my word of honour; and the neatest little pair of steppers in England;" how he had promptly tackled her, and been met with as prompt a "Who are you? I don't know you!" How he had taken off his hat, with the utmost politeness, and explained that his name was Power, of the Scarlet Lancers; how the incognita of the saucer eyes had looked him up and down, and through and through, until "By gad, you know, I felt like some shop-lifter," finally drawling out "Ah! and a credit you are to the Scarlet Lancers, I'm sure. Have they *all* manners as polished as yours?"

He enjoyed hearing Garnet, the third up the list of captains, despite his fifty and odd years and his bald head, groan over the evil fate which had sent him into the army twenty years too soon, or had made the abolition of purchase come—so far as he was concerned—twenty years too late.

"I'd be a major-general now, by gad, if I'd never been under the confounded purchase-system," he was wont to remark.

And with "poor old Garnet," as they called him, was a tradition of a pert young sub., who had condoled with him one day somewhat after the fashion of the comforters of Job—a tradition which by frequent repetition had passed into a universal plaster of comfort, for all the ills which can fall to the lot of a soldier. "Never you mind, Garnet," this youngster had called out, on the occasion of a troop being bought over the then senior sub.'s head; "never you mind, Mr. Garnet, sir—you'll soon be dead, an' then you'll be as well off as any of 'em!"

Garnet had got his troop, and the pert young sub. had broken his neck at a steeplechase, and his mother's heart at the same moment, but his comfort remained a regimental fixture.

It was not Garnet who entertained them on that particular evening, but the colonel himself, who, when once started on certain subjects, was wont to hold forth until half his listeners were asleep. His most favourite and inexhaustible topic was the end to which those old women—otherwise the War Office—are supposed, amongst a certain class of officers, to be bringing the army.

"Gad, they'll bring it up to something," he went on volubly to those in his immediate neighbourhood. "What is the latest *fad*? Norfolk jackets and

gaiters! Nor—folk jac—kets *and* gai—ters. All I can say is, the day that sees my men measured for Norfolk jackets and gaiters sees my papers sent in likewise.”

“Well, but, colonel,” Kerr advanced mischievously, for the sake of argument, “there are a good many advantages to be urged in defence of the scheme—there’s no denying that.”

“And what are they?” explosively.

“Ease and freedom, to begin with.”

“A good soldier wants neither ease nor freedom,” retorted the colonel, fiercely.

“Faith, sir,” put in Graves, laughing, “I often feel on a field-day as if I’d be thankful for a little of either.”

“Oh! *you*,” with unconcealed disdain. “I’ve no doubt. If ever you come to command a regiment, you’ll do without field-days altogether, I daresay.”

“Oh! I never shall come to that,” laughing again.

“For the good of your regiment *in futuro*, it is sincerely to be hoped not,” Colonel Wilson retorted.

“Well, but colonel,” from Kerr, with a kick to arrest the attention of his neighbours, “such a uniform would certainly be cheap.”

“Cheap, sir! We don’t want cheapness; it would simply open the army to a lot of snivelling vagabonds our present expenses keep out of it, Non-purchase lets ’em in, and the outfits keep ’em out.”

“But, I’ve another plea to urge,” Kerr went on, wickedly. “Less conspicuous in the field. There’s no getting over that.”

“And, bless my soul, why should you try to get over it,” cried the chief, almost bursting with exasperation. “England always has been conspicuous in the field, and, please God, England always will be—not but what she’s made a sad hash of it lately. And whose fault is it? Not the generals’ fault—nor the officers—nor the men, but those molly-coddling stingy old women, who please to call themselves *the authorities*! Sending out one man where ten are needed. Less conspicuous in the field! Good heavens! what next? Mark my words, the day that sees England’s army clad in Norfolk jackets and gaiters, will see England’s glory go down with a rush that she will never be able to recover.”

“But no army is so conspicuously clad as ours.”

“What army has ever been as uniformly glorious? Do you think I have forgotten, amongst all these new fads, how a handful of us kept

our ground at Inkerman, against ten times our numbers of those infernal grey-clad Russian brutes, that we could hardly distinguish from the grey mist; only 1,400 of us, and we kept our ground six long hours, until the reinforcements came up and saved us? What was good enough to lick the Russians in at Inkerman, ought to be good enough to lick Afghans and African savages."

"But you'd have done just as well in your shooting-jacket or your morning-coat," Kerr maintained.

"I don't know—I don't know at all."

"Well, sir, if poor ——, of the ——, had been in undress during that sortie from Caubool, depend upon it, he would have been spared the agony of carrying a bullet eight months in his stomach before it killed him; his scarlet facings cost him his life."

"Oh! very likely. An individual case, that. Would you re-organize the whole army because of *one* case? No, no; depend upon it, I know rather more about *practical* soldiering than any of you—or half those duffers up at the War Office, for the matter of that."

And, remembering the half-dozen medals and clasps Colonel Wilson displayed on the breast of his tunic, they were all silent. He had got the

best of the argument. He rose from the table, with a laugh.

“They’ll not carry it in my time; by then they’ll have made me a staff officer, with twenty letters after my name—D.A.C.G.—a kind of head-cook to the district, and open to tips from the contractors; eh, Mordaunt?” bringing a heavy friendly hand down on the shoulder of the man nearest to him.

During the whole harangue Mordaunt had been half asleep, but on being distinctly addressed roused himself with a start. “Never you mind, sir,” pulling himself together, sleepily; “never you mind, Colonel Wilson, sir; you’ll soon be dead, and then you’ll be as well off as any of ’em.”

Perhaps it was the absence of the usual laugh that warned him he had put his foot in it—perhaps it was the boiled-lobster expression on the chief’s astonished face—any way, Mordaunt suddenly became very wide awake indeed, and stumbled to his feet, with a stammering apology.

“Oh, I beg a thousand pardons, colonel! I did not know it was you; at least, I’m afraid I must have been half-asleep; you know, sir, I’ve been up three nights.”

Colonel Wilson cooled down instantly. “By-the-bye, how is Colyon to night?”

“Bad, sir, bad—very. I don’t believe he’s had an easy moment the last eight-and-forty hours; and really, what with the sitting up, lifting and moving and rubbing—anything to get a moment’s ease for him—*and* the field-day—I could pretty nearly go to sleep as I stand. It’s a horrible business—rheumatic fever.”

“Oh, horrible—horrible! Well, if you are going to do all this nursing, you must be excused field-days and duty.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I think, Mr. Graves, you are the next for duty?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Nice for you, Graves, you lazy beggar; you were going away on Wednesday, weren’t you?” laughed Calvert, as the door closed behind the colonel and Mordaunt.

“Say a swear, Bones,” laughed another.

“*Nev*—ar mind, Bones,” put in a third.

“Ah, that poor devil’s got rheumatic fever,” answered Graves. “I couldn’t cut up nasty at sparing Mordaunt to him; and oh, by gad! if ever I get rheumatic fever myself, let me have Mordaunt to look after me.”

“Why?”

“Never saw anything like it—rub—rub—rub,

chafe—chafe—chafe, up and down, just like a woman—only ten times as strong. Poor Colyon yells out if any one else goes near him. I suppose Mordaunt's caught the knack of it."

"Poor old Mordaunt, what a good-natured chap he is," Kerr put in; then, beginning to laugh, "oh, but it was good his coming out with 'comfort' to the chief; I thought he was going to burst."

"No wonder Mordaunt went to sleep with that everlasting jaw—jaw—jaw droning in his ears," laughed Preston.

"And Mordaunt wasn't the only one either," added Calvert, "look at old Garnet."

Kerr jumped up from his seat in a moment; "Hus——sh! don't wake him, get the mustard-pot—quickly."

"Where is it?"

"How the deuce should I know? Ask Farrer."

"Stop. I've got a mustard-leaf in my room; I'll get it in a minute. There now, stick it in water for half-a-minute, and clap it on his bald head."

So they did! For full five minutes Garnet slept serenely on, then he awoke with a yell, like the war-whoop of a wild Indian.

"What a dream," he spluttered, rubbing his eyes. But it wasn't altogether a dream—*it* continued.

“What the devil!—” he began; then he put his hand up to his head and found them out. “Why can’t you leave a fellow alone?”

“And what was the dream, Garnet?” Kerr asked, when he had recovered his laughter.

“Oh, I dreamed I was like the soldier at Perim,” Garnet answered, wiping his head, gingerly.

“And what was he?”

“Don’t you know? A black sheep—and died—and didn’t go to Paradise, but the other place. Bless you, in two days back he came for his blanket—he said it was cold, *compared to Perim*.”

“Ha—ha—ha! you know then what you’ll have to expect,” cried Kerr. “Hollo! who’s that?—why its Bootles! Well, Bootles, old man, when did you come, and where do you hail from?”

“London—Antwerp—Amsterdam—Norway, &c.,” returned Bootles, concisely. “How are you all?”

“Oh, flourishing,” answered Kerr, for everyone; “except Colyon, who’s down with rheumatic fever.”

“Colyon!—very bad?”

“Very bad; won’t get over it, poor chap, I’m afraid. Well! have you had good sport?”

“Splendid! never better.”

“Picked up any extra good stories? Garnet here has just come out with a new one; and oh, such a joke! The chief’s been having an extra jaw to-

night on those 'damned old women up at the Horse Guards, sir,' and sent Mordaunt off as sound as a church. Mordaunt's been up three nights with Colyon. The chief spoke to him suddenly and he blurted out, 'Never you mind, sir, you'll soon be dead, and ——' "

"No," cried Bootles, with an incredulous laugh.

"Fact; the chief's face was a study, and so, by Jove, was Mordaunt's, when he got fairly awake! Well, any news?"

"No; but I came across two splendid 'Arrys' yesterday."

"Go on," cried half-a-dozen voices: Bootles was a favourite story-teller.

"One was at Antwerp—at dinner. I found him in the midst of a group of deferential foreigners, who probably thought him a lord at least, from the flash rings on his fingers and the amount of pomatum on his head. Perhaps they expected to improve their English—heaven knows. I didn't hear the beginning, for I was looking at a little girl over the other side of the table—the smartest girl I've seen for an age: jolly dark hair and eyes, and a regular English figure; all said and done, English girls——"

"But, 'Arry—get on," impatiently from Calvert.

"Oh, yes, to be sure. Well, 'Arry, leaning his

elbows on the table, with graceful negligence, caught my attention with, 'Ah! the last time I was outside of a 'orse I gort short orf, and the 'orse 'e must 'ave known 'is way 'ome better than I did, for when I gort 'ome the pore 'orse was standing a-poring at the staible dore.' My little gal, across the table looked at him for full five minutes, then muttered under her breath, 'Pore 'Arry.' Gad, it was fine!"

Of course a great roar of laughter greeted the story, nor was he permitted to relapse into a reverie on the attractions of the little girl, with the jolly dark hair and eyes.

"Go on," said Kerr, "let's have the other."

"Oh! the other was at Amsterdam; a lanky, loose-limbed, lantern-jawed, yellow-toothed Yankee, with eyes like a dead cod-fish, and a skin like an old parchment deed; with a wife to match. Charteris and I breakfasted at the Amstel, and these two sat opposite. I never so much as looked at the brute, as you may imagine, but he tackled me, with 'A fine city this, sir.' 'Oh, er—awfully so!' I answered. Then he tried Charteris; you know Charteris?"

"I do," answered Preston. "Big—fair—impressive; speaks at the rate of a word a minute, with a 'haw' or 'er' thrown in."

"That's the man. Says my big Yankee to him,

‘I kind o’ kalkalate these yere Zoo—logical Guardens are the best in Eu—rope.’ Charteris looked up, opened his mouth, then shut it, pulled one arm a little out of his sleeve, then the other, ‘I—er—think—not.’ ‘Oh, yes! I kalkalate they’re reg’lar tip-top-pers.’ ‘Reallay,’ returned Charteris, with mature deliberation over each word; ‘but-haw—I—er—think—if—er—you—er—go—to—haw—the—er—Guar—dens—in—er—Regent’s—er—Park—you’ll—er—’ ‘I guess not!’ broke in Jonathan, ‘at these yere Guardens they’ve a real live hippopomi and his missus—only ones in the world.’ ‘Haw—no!’ said Charteris, gravely, ‘If—er—you—go—er—to—Regent’s—er—er Park, you—er—will—not—er—onlay—see—er—Mis—taw—Hippopotamus—and—er—Mrs.—Hippo—er—potamus—but—er—Babay—Hippopotamus—er—also.’ I can’t quite give you the way in which Charteris said ‘reallay’ and ‘onlay’ and ‘babay,’ but I can tell you that not the least little bit of amusement flickered on his good-looking wooden face, not the faintest twinkle came into his steady blue eyes. Gad, he might have been giving evidence on a court martial! it kept me from bursting out laughing in Jonathan’s face. The Yankee collapsed; not one word—good, bad, or indifferent—did he utter to anyone at the table; but when a waiter brought him bread instead of beer, didn’t he slang him, rather. However, the

cream of the joke is to come ; and, oddly enough, neither Charteris nor the Yankee heard it. He left me at Antwerp to go on to Paris, and there I picked up some charming people—half Dutch, half Portuguese-Jewish—father, mother, and two pretty daughters. I was telling one of them about it when she said, ‘But, do you not know dat de latest Ba-bee Hippo was born of de Amsterdamsche parents, and *sold* to de people at Regent’s Park?’ Now, did you ever hear of such a sell in all your days?”

“Pooh! you make it all up as you go on,” Calvert laughed, struggling with a yawn.

“Not I. Well, I am as tired as a dog, so I’ll be off to bed. Good night, you fellows.”

“So am I,” said Kerr, following him! “I’ll come with you.”

As Kerr turned and closed the door behind them, Bootles—otherwise Algy Ferrers—slipped his arm into that of his friend.

“What have you been doing, whilst I’ve been away, Charlie?”

“The usual grind. I had three days in town last week.”

“See Mademoiselle Mignon?” with a laugh, and a squeeze of the arm he held.

“Yes, I saw her,” the shadow leaping into his grey eyes again.

“And did she send me a message? I say, Charlie, old fellow, I’m glad your future wife likes me as well as she does; I should detest a woman who was jealous of me, and somehow nine women out of ten *are* jealous of their husband’s friends.”

“Pussey will never be jealous of you, Bootles.”

“No, I’m sure she won’t. Did she tell you I called on her, as I passed through; and, as I had the afternoon to spare, I took her to the Academy?”

“She wrote to me of it.”

“Yes? I admire her immensely; such a perfect little lady—a regular Mademoiselle Mignon. After all, Charlie, we poor devils, knocking about from pillar to post, we can appreciate that sort of thing when we meet with it, which is not often. Now, little Mademoiselle Mignon is not only so excessively pretty, but so true and simple with it. She spoke out so nicely about you; never made a bit of sham humbug about what she cared for you. ‘If anything were to come between Charlie and I, I should die,’ she said. We were looking at a picture, that suggested the idea; and she said it as if she meant it too.”

“I hope not,” said Kerr, gravely.

“I hope not, too,” rejoined Bootles, misunderstanding him. “Not that there is any fear of it. I think, Charlie, when you are married, I shall make up to the younger sister; I just saw her for two minutes.”

“Bootles—I’m—not going to be married.”

“WHAT?”

“At least—that is—it’s all off,” said Kerr, miserably.

“*All off!*” Bootles echoed, “is it possible? Lord, how these women do take us in. I would have staked my very life and soul on her fidelity.” In answer to which Charlie fairly groaned. Somehow, the groan let a light in upon the other’s perplexity. “Oh,” he remarked, in tones that were decidedly changed, “then it’s you, is it? you surprise me.”

Kerr looked up. “Don’t speak in that tone, Bootles,” he began, but Bootles interrupted him.

“My dear fellow,” with a laugh—a make-believe sort of laugh, “it’s no earthly concern of mine, I’ve no right to take any ‘tone’ at all; as I said before—you have surprised me.”

“But I want to tell you——”

“I want to go to bed. I’m dead tired,” trying hard to make his voice and manner the same; “talking and telling won’t do any good, so good night.”

“Good night,” answered Kerr, wretchedly. Left to himself, he determined that he would ask for two days’ leave on the morrow; that he might go back and beg the girl who loved him to forget the cloud which had come between them, and let things

be as they had been aforetime. He thought over all Bootles had said about her—"Mademoiselle Mignon—a perfect little lady—so excessively pretty—so true and simple." What a fool he had been to let such charms be thrown into the shade by the face of a woman he barely knew; a widow—a *Mrs. Smith*! Thank heaven, the warm terms in which his best friend had spoken of his first love had opened his eyes, just in time. Not for a week had Kerr felt so happy, as when he got into his bed that night. Calvert came singing to his room, just afterwards:

"An arm like iron and a muscle like steel,
A heart for a friend that can always feel,
A will, once made, no man can repeal,
This is what an Englishman is made of."

And that time Charlie Kerr did not greet Calvert's singing with an oath, or a growl as to "a caterwauling maid-of-all-work."

CHAPTER II.

It was a great Frenchman who said, "All things come to him who can afford to wait." Between you and me, that was one of the most wonderful truths ever written; only, there are so many who cannot afford it. Many an artist would make a great name if he could wait, but he cannot; he must daub

away at pot-boilers and push through the drudgery of teaching, trusting to some future time of comparative ease of circumstances to be able to work for a name; and, long before that time draws near, his style is fixed, and he has sunk into a slough of mediocrity, from which he will never be able to extricate himself.

How many a writer of talent might make his mark, if he could take time with his work, prune it and pare it, re-write and re-model! But he cannot do that! The sordid needs of to-day outweigh the golden promises of to-morrow; and after awhile he finds himself written out, with no elegance and purity of style to fall back upon, when the freshness of his ideas has gone; like the artist, his style is fixed, and a bad, jerky, slipshod style it is—the style that must get on—the style that cannot afford to wait.

And how many there are who cannot afford to wait, in a moral sense; whose good resolutions, if carried out at once, would tide them safely over many a slippery place; but, put to the test of waiting, fail them altogether, and end by an even greater backsliding.

Charlie Kerr was one of these. Could he have gone straight up to town and renewed his love for the girl he called Pussey—Mademoiselle Mignon—

in reality, Rosa Wendall—it is quite certain that I should have had no further story to tell, save of the orthodox satin and orange blossoms; but, unfortunately, leave he could not obtain.

“I am sorry to refuse you, Kerr,” the colonel said to him; “but I have just had a letter to say the Duke is coming on Friday, to inspect the regiment—with a foreign personage in the background; shouldn’t wonder if it’s the Crown Prince; and I have had to recall those who are away. You can have leave on Saturday, if you like.”

“Thank you sir,” he answered, real disappointment gnawing at his heart.

His good resolutions did not fail him that day, for he had not so much as a glimpse of the fascinating widow; but on the following afternoon, when after a very long field-day and a long parade, he was sauntering down the High Street, he met her, in all the charms of her beautiful womanhood. Of course, he stopped; ostensibly to thank her for the flowers she had sent him—he had already done so formally on paper—but, in reality to feast his soul on the glorious loveliness of her amber hair and the blue radiance of her large eyes. Once, whilst he was speaking, it occurred to him she was different.

“Does your head ache, Mrs. Smith?” he asked.

“My head—oh, no! thank you,” she replied. “I am going home—will you come in and have a cup of tea?”

“I shall be delighted,” he answered, turning to walk beside her; and then, alas! the last of his good resolutions went towards the paving of that famous road, which leads ever downwards and downwards.

They had their cup of tea *tête-à-tête*; and certainly Mrs. Smith did her utmost to amuse and entertain her visitor. She had only been about a fortnight in Bathingtown, where she had taken a furnished house for three months. She explained to him that she had flowers and fruit and things sent from her own place in Wiltshire every morning; and, by means of the first-named, managed to give her rooms a tolerably home-like appearance.

“Did you not wonder at my sending you the flowers?” she asked.

“Perhaps a little; it was very pleasant wonder, though,” he told her.

“Yes. I sent them for a reason I will tell you of some day; to-morrow, I will send you some for a very different one.”

“You are quite too kind,” he murmured. “Do you know, Mrs. Smith, I am sure you are not well—or you’re bothered—or something?”

“I am—worried,” she answered, lifting her great clear limpid eyes to his. “I went up to town yesterday to see my mother; and there I heard news that has worried me, more than I was ever worried before, in all my eight-and-twenty years.”

“I am very sorry to hear it,” with a very gentle sigh of commiseration. “I hope Mrs.—er—you see I don’t know what your maiden name was—but your mother, I mean; I hope she is not ill.”

“My maiden name was Bolitho,” answered Mrs. Smith, watching him through half-closed eyelids. “No; my mother is not ill, thanks.”

She chatted on for the best part of an hour; talking fluently and well on many topics, charming him as poor little Rosa Wendall had never been able to do—charming him, as a beautiful, rich, thoroughly cultivated, travelled woman of eight-and-twenty can charm a man of the world; and the result of it all was, that he went away more hopelessly infatuated and entangled than ever.

“Come in to-morrow afternoon,” said the fair widow at parting. “Come any day after five; you will always find me in.”

Before he dressed for mess, he thought the whole scene over again, with a pipe. In spite of himself, he was a little puzzled. There was some-

thing in the background; something behind all the sweet speeches, the coquettish glances, and, for the life of him, he couldn't make out what that something was? He knew very well, that if he were not desperately in love with her, her evident—well, what should he call it?—her—her—preference for him, would fill him with disgust; and yet, behind the coquettish glances was a certain hard glitter that reminded him of cold steel; among all the gay laughter was an artificial ring that jarred upon him; in spite of the downright spooney manner, he had a very fixed idea that if he were to give her a kiss she would slap his face—probably slap it hard! He couldn't make her out! Was she some adventuress, on the prowl for a husband, and did those costly hot-house blooms come from Covent Garden? Who was she? Mrs. Smith might be anybody; and though he had known a dozen different Bolithos, all in good society—yet the name might be but assumed. He couldn't understand it a bit; but, oh, how gloriously lovely she was! and how he longed and looked forward to the days, when she would lay that proud head down upon his breast, and promise to be his own. She might be an adventuress of the most outrageous type—her “place” might be a humbug—her name a sham; her person was

what he had fallen in love with, and, as to that, there could be no deception.

The inspection-day came and went; so did the Duke; so did the foreign personage, who wasn't a crown prince at all, but only a Saxe-somebody or other; but Kerr never applied for the leave the colonel had promised him. Day after day found him in Mrs. Smith's drawing-room—the only visitor. If she was, indeed, as he had suspected, an adventuress, she played a very concentrated game—a game that would inevitably land her fish.

And yet, he was more puzzled than ever. The cold steel look, the artificial laughter, and the stand-offishness still remained, though he went in and out of her house like a dog in a fair, and they had become very intimate; nor did she seem in any hurry to get her fish landed. Her three months' term had almost expired, and yet the momentous words had never been uttered; the words he was dying to utter, and those he was dying to hear. Twice, on the days he was on duty, his brother officers, one or other of them, had mentioned the fact that the handsome widow had been up to town; they had seen her at the station, and so forth. Yet, she had not mentioned the circumstance to him on either occasion; though when he had spoken of it, she had answered care-

lessly enough, "Yes, I was in town yesterday;" in a manner which had not encouraged him to ask for further particulars.

He was not very happy at that time! He did not think she cared anything about him; though he could not shut his eyes to the fact that she encouraged him, as much as a lady could do. At all manner of inconvenient and unexpected hours, too, the remembrance of Mademoiselle Mignon's little wan face recurred to him, in a way that made his ears tingle and his cheeks burn! Not that he ever heard her name mentioned. The only one of his brother officers who knew her name was Bootles, and during the past two months between Bootles and himself a barrier had risen up, which the one could not and the other would not break down. Outwardly, Bootles was the same, but he never entered Kerr's room now; he never called him "Charlie" or by any of the odd terms of endearment soldiers are accustomed to apply to one another; least of all, did he ever mention or allude in any way to the girl, whom he had called "Mademoiselle Mignon—the perfect little lady—so simple and true."

December had set in and half the fellows were on leave. Bathingtown was deserted, and many people wondered that the handsome widow, who

made so few friends and seemed so entirely taken up with the tall lancer, stayed. "Charlie's widow," the fellows called her; and Charlie, hearing them, used to smile, wondering if she would ever consent to run the risk of becoming so?

"I say, Charlie," said one of the fellows to him one afternoon, when he was on duty; "I saw your widow this afternoon; she came down from town in the next carriage to me. Bootles was with her, and, 'pon my word, they seemed so awfully thick, I didn't like to get into the same carriage, though I was going to."

"Bootles!" echoed Charlie, blankly.

"Bootles," the other repeated; "and the widow was crying—crying like anything."

It was inexplicable—Bootles and Mrs. Smith?

The idea of the two together seemed as impossible to him as a union of fire and water. Why, he couldn't have said, for he had never heard either mention the other. He was, however, so astonished and so curious, that he went into his old friend's room; a thing he had not done for weeks.

"I say, Bootles," he said, entering.

Bootles, who was lying in a big chair, smoking, looked up. "Oh, is that you, Kerr?" with a sudden politeness, that cut Charlie to the very heart; "have a chair."

"Have you been to town?" Charlie asked.

"Yes, I have. Why?"

"I say, I didn't know you knew Mrs. Smith."

"Didn't you? I've known her some time."

"Really. She was in town to-day also?"

"Yes," looking straight into the fire; "she's a very nice woman, comes of a nice family."

"What was she crying about, to-day?"

"Who told you she was crying?" turning to him sharply.

"Preston told me."

"Oh, Preston; he was in the train, then. It was some family trouble. Ask her yourself, to-morrow. I daresay she'll tell you."

"Oh, I'm sure she will," returned Charlie, stung by the other's tone, and rising; "well, it's time to dress."

Accordingly, about five on the following afternoon, he went down to Mrs. Smith's house. The drawing-room was empty, but she came to him almost immediately. The awful change in her appearance struck Charlie instantly.

"My own darling, what is it?" he asked.

She drew her hand away from the eager clasp of his, and sank on to a couch, pointing to a chair.

But Charlie did not take it; he flung himself

down at her feet; and, now that the flood-gates of his passions were opened, poured out the whole story of his love—his adoration—his abject worship—for her.

“Do you want me to marry you?” asked Mrs. Smith, in a very low voice.

“My dearest, I have been wishing that ever since the day I first saw you,” he cried.

“I have something to tell you”—with an evident effort.

“I don’t want to hear it.” He thought the confirmation of his suspicions was at hand. “Nothing will make any difference in my love for you; I will hear nothing.”

“You must.” She sat upright, and pushed the golden hair off her white forehead, with a weary gesture. “I have told you that my maiden name was Bolitho.”

“Yes.”

“My mother married again.”

“You did not tell me that.”

“Nevertheless, it is so. She married early. I was but a child—and she had two daughters.”

“Yes.”

“The eldest of these two, whilst staying in Cornwall a few months ago, met with an officer, who fell in love with her.”

“Yes!” He was becoming horribly interested by her story. “Yes! And his name was——”

“Kerr—Charlie Kerr,” said Mrs. Smith.

“Oh, God in Heaven!” he gasped.

“I was always very fond of Rosey; and I took this house, solely to give her the pleasure of being with you—in deference to her wishes, I did not mention the relationship between us, when you were introduced to me. The child wished to surprise you by her sudden appearance here.”

“And—and——”

“And I ruined her life—all innocently. It never entered my mind you could have a false thought in your head, until I saw Rosey, the week after you jilted her.”

“No! no!” he cried out.

“Jilted her,” Mrs. Smith repeated. “I couldn’t understand it; but when I met you, it suddenly became clear to me. From that moment I set myself to win your love—your heart—and I think I succeeded.”

“Yes! you succeeded,” he said, growing whiter and whiter each moment.

“And do you think, Mr. Kerr,” her eyes all cold steel now, “that I shall be likely to answer ‘yes’ to your very flattering proposal?”

He did not speak at all, but slowly rose up to his feet, with a face like a statue of marble.

“I have succeeded in punishing you,” the widow went on, “but what will give my little sister back——?”

“I will! I have been a scoundrel, a cad, a brute, anything you like; but I am not altogether callous. She knows nothing of this; let me go back and make friends with her again; I know she will forgive me. You have dealt out justice to me with a merciless hand, be merciful now, and trust me to give my whole life for her happiness.”

“It is too late,” she answered, “my sister died at noon, yesterday.” Then she broke down altogether, and hid her face among the cushions of the sofa.

For five minutes he stood watching her; then he went out of her house, like a man in a dream, to carry for his whole life the burden of an upbraiding conscience, which had tried so very very hard in the days that were gone to keep all this misery from coming to pass.

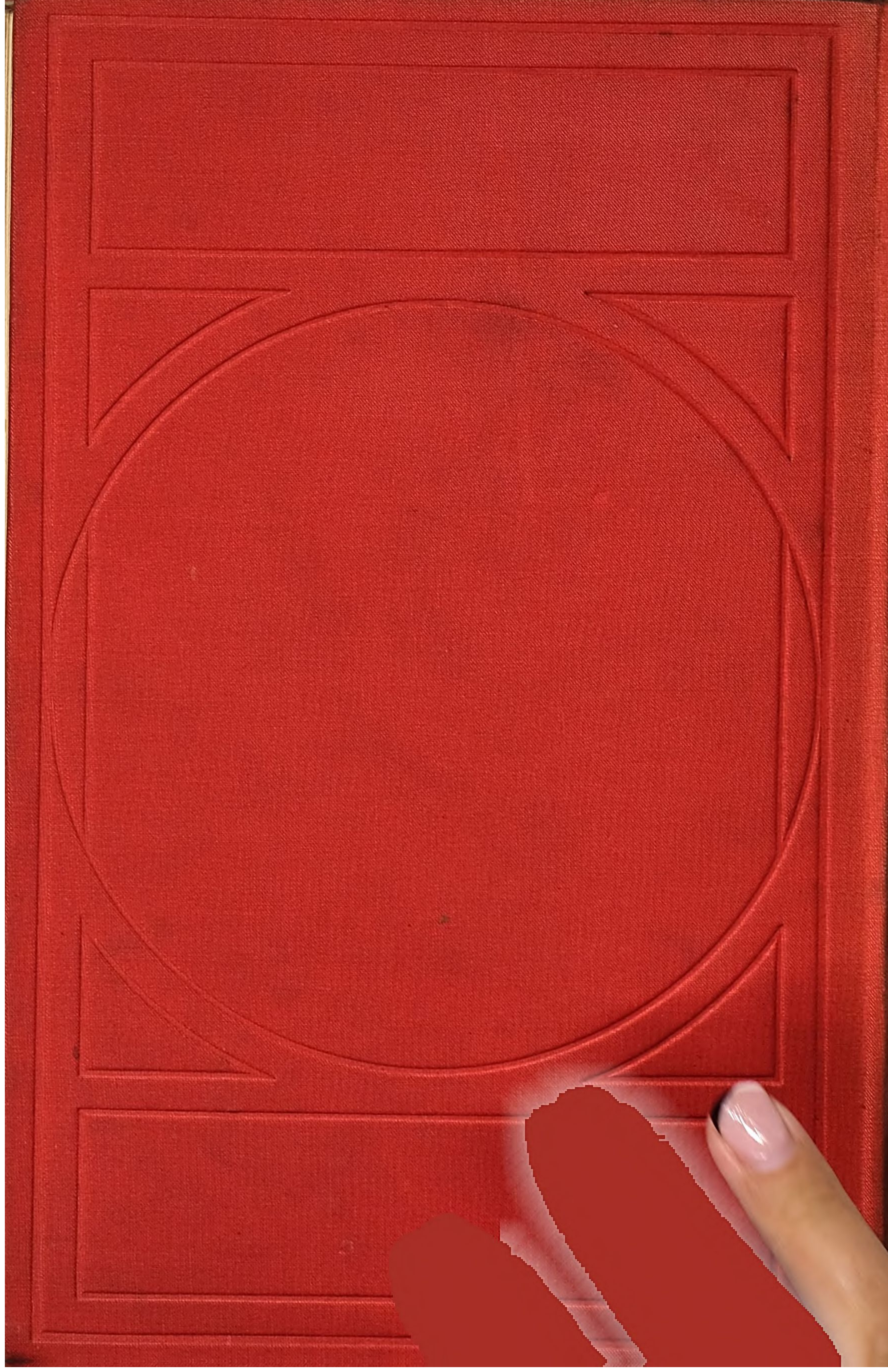
In his room, Calvert was singing—

“With loving lips and true grey eyes,
I called her my Rose-Marie!
Over the hills and far away,
Dwells my love, my Rose-Marie.”

The stick and gloves Charlie Kerr carried slipped from his fingers on to the floor; and the fingers flew to cover the handsome grey eyes, that were full of tears!

KELLY & CO.,
28, LITTLE QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN, W.C.,
AND MIDDLE MILL, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

Einmal leicht flechtig!



Winter, J. S.

Cavalry life or Sketches and stories in barracks and out in two volumes

Bd.: 2

London 1881

Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek -- L.angl.o.188-p(2
urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11716265-1